PZ
3
.S636
Tw
2

FT MEADE
GenColl

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. PZ3 Copyright No.

Shelf .S636Tw
2

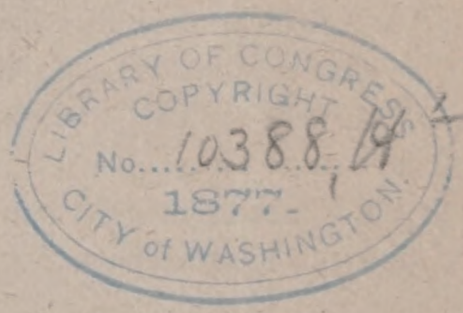
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

TWO KISSES.

BY

HAWLEY SMART.

"Methinks no wrong it were, if I should steal
From those two melting rubies one poor kiss."



LORING, Publisher,
Cor. Bromfield and Washington Sts.,
BOSTON.
1877

PZ3
.S636Tw
2

Press of

ROCKWELL AND CHURCHILL,

39 Arch Street, Boston.

Copyright, 1877.

A. K. LORING.

TWO KISSES.

CHAPTER I.

MAJOR JENKENS.

THE Linford races are just over. The bulk of visitors have hied them home by the six train, and the city generally has emptied itself of the influx that the races always attract; for Linford is a meeting of some celebrity, and always freely patronized by the followers of the turf. Still, the city has not as yet settled down. The retiring tide has left shallows and channels behind it that yet eddy and ripple in memory of the fierce rush of waters.

The billiard-room of the "Reindeer" indeed is still bubbling with excitement. A somewhat noisy and tumultuous pool is going on there, very different from the quiet six-penny game usual among its habitués. Shilling lives and much venturing of half-crowns is the order of the evening; yet it is easy to see the players are chiefly townsfolk, or young farmers from the surrounding district, winding up their two days' outing for the most part. The sharks, with keen, avid eye for the country minnow, that follow in the wake of most race meetings, have taken their departure. Those flashily-dressed men, so anxious to lay against everything and anything, who filled the room the previous night, are no longer there. Away in the whizzing special, with their foul pipes and fouler language, in pursuit of fresh prey; speeding towards London, in search of other victims with fatuous fancies for backing the favorite, solacing themselves meanwhile with flasks of strong waters, such games as may be accomplished by the dim light of the carriage lamp.

The billiard-room is heavy with tobacco-smoke, and reeking with the steam of hot and strong potations. The babble and laughter wax louder, and vociferations to wage half-crowns are shouted incessantly as the game fluctuates.

"Red upon green, black your player," calls the wizened, rat-like marker in monotonous tone, and a slight, neatly-dressed man, of medium height, wearing spectacles, advances to the table, almost mechanically chalking his cue as he does so. He hesitates a little and seems undecided what to play for.

"I'll take your two crowns to one you don't hold it, sir," exclaims a flushed, fresh-colored young man from the bench that runs round the room.

"If you like," replies the player, "but I don't care about betting — I only play for amusement."

"Come, sir, that won't do, you have picked up a goodish few of my half-crowns to-night, to say nothing of other people's."

"As you like," replied the player again, with a deprecatory shrug of his shoulders.

"He's got to the end of his nerve, Tom," cried the young man, somewhat boisterously, "and my silver's coming back to me."

"I don't know," remarked the other; "he's seemed a bit nervous all along, but he hasn't missed much."

"Life off green," cried the marker in his usual monotone, as that ball rolled gently into the pocket, and the red came slowly back down the table. "Stroke and division. Take your stroke, sir."

"I don't know. Yes, I think so. I must be off to bed now, gentlemen, so I'll have the shot."

The hazard he had just made was by no means a difficult one, but that which now presented itself was. To be made undoubtedly. What is not at billiards? But certainly not one that anything but a fine player could expect to accomplish without much favoring of fortune.

Had there been a shrewd observer present, he might have noticed that the elderly gentleman, just before playing, invariably gave his spectacles a slight hitch, and that when he struck his ball a marvellously keen pair of black eyes peered forth *below* them. But there was little chance of that being noticed in the noisy company. As he again chalked his cue preparatory to his final stroke, his former antagonist exclaimed, in somewhat irritable tones: —

"Come, sir, you have had the best of me all night. I lay you two sovereigns to one you don't hold the black."

"You cannot expect me to take that," returned the other, quietly. "This is a very difficult stroke; and though I could play a little once, I can't see very well now. We won't have a bet this time."

"Nonsense. You've won several times of me, and say you're going. I insist upon a last chance. I'll lay you three sovereigns to one you don't hold it. In these parts we play on the square, and always give a fellow his revenge."

"Do you mean to say, sir, that I don't play on the square?" retorted the elderly gentleman, sharply, and bringing the butt of his cue angrily on the floor.

"No, of course not," stammered his antagonist, considerably taken aback by this demonstration on the part of one whom he had fancied might be bullied with impunity. "I only meant — in short, you ought to give me another chance for my money, you know."

"Very good," replied the other quietly. "I take your three sovereigns to one,

then. But, recollect, I may win, and if you can't afford to lose, you had better not bet. It is only school-boys that cry out when they lose. What is it to be, sir? Bet or no bet?"

The altercation had attracted some attention in the room by this time, and the young fellow on the bench, who was, if truth must be told, one of Messrs. Cullington's (they kept the leading drapery establishment in Linford) young men, felt ashamed to withdraw his offer. He aspired to being regarded as fast among his compeers — an ambition that o'erleaps itself in much higher circles than his. The eyes of his comrades were upon him. He felt it was impossible to go back, although he was already impressed with the conviction that the elderly gentleman in spectacles would assuredly hold that ball, and that his slender purse, on which the night had already made considerable inroads, would be still further impoverished.

"Of course, I stand by what I said," he at last replied, sullenly, with that dogged persistence so often the characteristic of men when they feel they are getting the worst of it.

"Of course you do, Jack," chorused some of his friends. "A fellow always stands by his opinion who is anything like a good plucked one. Why, it'd be ten to one against Cook himself holding that ball."

Though slightly comforted by such friendly assurance, the somewhat crestfallen layer of odds could but recollect that these peremptory arbiters of Cook's capabilities had never enjoyed the privilege of seeing that artist play, and what Cook could or could not do was not of so much importance to him just then, as how far the talent of his spectacled opponent extended.

For a minute or so the room was hushed as the elderly gentleman poised his cue. Another moment, and he had proved to the spectators that whatever odds it might be against Cook, it was no safe three to one against him; for, playing with tolerable strength, he drove the black ball into the top corner pocket, and left his own spinning in its place.

"Not lost my game so much as I thought," he remarked blandly, as he pushed his spectacles once more well down upon his nose, and handed over his cue to the marker. "Yes, quite right, thank you," he continued urbanely, as that functionary handed him over the pool. "A trifle for yourself, my man. Three sovereigns, thank you, sir. You are unlucky; I don't suppose I should make that stroke once in ten times. Your friends estimated the odds very (with considerable inflection on the first syllable) correctly. Good-night, gentlemen."

"Who is he? Where did he come from? Did you ever see him play before?" asked half-a-dozen impatient mouths as the door closed behind the triumphant pool-player.

"He's a Major Jenkens, as has been staying here the last three days," returned the marker, laconically, "and I never saw him touch a cue till to-night, but it's my belief, gents, he's had one in his hand pretty often, looking at his style; he weren't

showy, but he were very sure — never played a fancy shot the whole evening till the last.

"He's a regular leg, that's what he is," exclaimed the victim, "and if the old scoundrel hadn't slunk off to bed, I'd have told him so."

Even as he spoke, the door opened, and the major re-entered the room.

"I have left my spectacle-case on the mantel-piece. Ah, yes, that's it, thank you. Once more good-night. I trust, sir, you will be more fortunate in the next pool," and the major looked very straight through his spectacles at his utterly confounded antagonist.

Mr. John Silk, of the house of Cullington and Co., did not express his private sentiments on this occasion; but better men than he had before now failed to tell the major their private opinion of him when it came to that point. It did not seem quite so easy to call that cool, self-possessed, gentlemanly man, clothed in the panoply of his spectacles, a swindler to his face; and yet people, with considerable more experience of Major Jenkens than Mr. John Silk, had come at times very much to that opinion concerning him.

The major, meanwhile, lights his candle, and betakes himself to his bedroom, with very little anxiety as to what the company in the billiard-room may think of him. Not much wont to trouble his head about such small matter as the suffrages of his fellows is Major Jenkens, — treating them indeed for the most part as sent into the world expressly to minister to his wants and necessities, imbued, I am afraid, with slight respect for the general intellectual powers of mankind, but powerfully impressed with belief in their gullibility.

Having gained his chamber, the major proceeds to wind up his watch with due deliberation, and then, turning out his pockets, counts their contents in a quiet, business-like fashion.

"Six pounds eleven and six," he mutters. "Not a bad night's work for a country billiard-room, and will pay my hotel-bill handsomely. I picked up a little, too, on the race-course. No; I have not succeeded in finding the man I wanted, but fortune has been kind to me. Yes, the trip doesn't owe me anything. My eye and hand, though not true enough for London, are good enough yet another half-dozen years in the provinces. But, really," he continued, with a deprecatory elevation of his eyebrows, "country practice is not 'worth the candle.' *Pour passer le temps*, perhaps, but not a serious avocation for a man of ability. Dear me, how spectacles always do bamboozle people! Because you wear glasses, they always conclude you can't see."

Major Jenkens was busied, while thus reflecting, in packing up his belongings preparatory to an early start. It was curious how neat and precise he was in all his arrangements. He folded such garments as he placed within his portmanteau with scrupulous care, placed his watch and purse by his bedside, and even disposed his

brushes, spectacles and razor, with almost mathematical regularity on the dressing-table.

It was singular to remark how deft and dexterous his supple fingers were in all these little minutiæ, how quick and decided he seemed to be on every point; how the nervous, diffident manner which had so characterized him in the billiard-room seemed to have disappeared. There were people who, mistrusting Claxby Jenkens, declared that this nervousness of manner was assumed at will for purposes of his, Claxby Jenkens', own. But the major always vowed that he was shy among strange company; that it was a weakness of his boyhood, which he had never succeeded in shaking off — he supposed he never should now. Certain it was that this shy, hesitating manner was invariably to be observed in the major on first making his acquaintance, and yet it was equally worthy to be noted what cool requests this diffident gentleman sometimes proffered at short notices to people of whom he knew but little.

His belongings being in what the major would have termed due "marching order," that gentleman sought his pillow with the calm satisfaction of a man who had done his duty to himself, a matter of considerably higher import in his eyes than any exertion on that point regarding his neighbor. To tell the truth, the major was a little apt to regard his neighbor as an undeclared enemy, seeking to obtain some slight advantage over him, an advantage which the major had long ago decided that his duty towards his neighbor required him to keep entirely on his own side the ledger, — a conclusion which he had contrived to carry out with tolerable success. Those that could say they had been vouchsafed the best of their dealings with Major Claxby Jenkens were not numerous.

Plausible and liberal as he had sometimes seemed in matter of help to his fellows, wonderful as had appeared his disinterestedness to both men and even women at times, yet it was remarkable how the *quid pro quo*, the return for his exertions on such occasions, had come about. The recipients of his help sometimes ground their teeth hard when the reckoning came, and they discovered what it was he required of them for such assistance; but they usually did his bidding, the fact being that refusal in some cases was next door to impossible. Claxby Jenkens was very fond of succoring his neighbor in the hour of trial; but, impressed with the frailty of human nature, Claxby Jenkens was wont to take stringent precautions that his neighbor should never fall into the sin of ingratitude.

"Men are so apt to forget those who have befriended them," quoth the major. "I am singularly fortunate; those I have had the good luck to be of service to never forget me."

He was right; they must have been much favored of Providence, or entirely gulfed 'neath life's stormy waters if they did. Assistance from the major was a thing certain to have to be accounted for in due course, and likely to bear exorbitant interest.

Meanwhile Major Claxby Jenkens, anxious even in his slumbers not to be got the best of, takes it out of the sheets and blankets of the "Reindeer," as if still bearing

in mind that, having to pay for the bed, it behoved him to get as much sleep as he could out of it.

CHAPTER II.

THE BANKRUPT'S WIDOW.

THERE are not many pleasanter situations in London than Hanover street, Hanover square, west; more especially if you are located on its north side, and so get the advantage of what that neighborhood regards as the morning sun. For Regent street and its tributaries do not pretend to much necessity for sunlight till between nine and ten; of course it is well it should be out and warming the day, taking the chill out of the night-air and so on; but the people who live on those pleasant first-floors of the streets running west of the great artery are not wont to trouble themselves regarding tea and rolls much before the latter hour. Certainly you have more seclusion, magnificence, and are altogether more flavored with aristocracy, if you take up your abode in Belgravia or its vicinity; but what is so delightful as a stroll down Regent street on a sunny May morning? The throng, the shops, the broad, well-swept causeway — is there anything approaching to it for an idler in all London?

It is rather soon for the park, perhaps, and even if it were not, to your inveterate street-lounger Rotten Row is a comparatively dreary entertainment. But Regent street, the noblest lounge of all the civilized world, to which the Grand Boulevard of Paris, or the Broadway of New York, are as nothing, there is always a romance, a picture, a story, or a jest, to be found there; much food for reflection to be got out of a walk up that regal promenade, take it when you will.

In the window of a prettily furnished sitting-room in Hanover street are seated two ladies, looking lazily out on the passers-by, — striking women both of them, dressed with admirable taste, and in the extrême of the fashion. One wears a widow's weeds; but the richness of her well-fitting robe, the soft folds of her crape, and the delicate coquettish cap half concealed in the wealth of her rich dark tresses, augur of well-to-do sorrow by no means incapable of consolation. A tall, shapely woman she looks, as she lies indolently back in her chair, displaying a neatly turned ankle and buckled shoe.

Her companion is more vivacious in appearance, more impetuosity visible in the very whisk she gives to her well-flounced skirts, as she settles herself more easily in her seat and observes: —

"So you're a widow, Lizzie. Well, my dear, considering what we know your late lamented was, I don't know that I feel altogether called upon to condole with you."

"Perhaps not. I am not going to pretend to you that I could have any love for Mr. Hemsworth. I married him as a child, and he took good care that I should form no

heroic conception of him afterwards. We will not touch on that, please. Mark Hemsworth is gone, and though he never took any pains to gain my affections, yet he sheltered me for five years, and he was my husband, remember."

"Yes, he was," retorted Lizzie Paynter, viciously; "I am not likely to forget it, nor you either, for the matter of that. I have seen him recall the fact to your recollection pretty often, my dear, in days gone by. If I had been in your place, the lamented Mark would have found his fingers in hot water many a time, but you—" and Mrs. Paynter shrugged her shoulders as though to say there are women who will submit to anything.

"Do please let bygones be bygones, Lizzie. How Mark treated me surely concerns only myself now. I don't know," she continued, plaintively, "that there ever was any one else it mattered to. You see from the day of my marriage I have never had a friend to appeal to. From that moment my father vanished, and I don't even know whether he is dead or alive."

"No?" ejaculated Mrs. Paynter, sitting bolt upright in her chair with astonishment.

"It is the fact, though," said Cissy, sadly. "I haven't a friend in the world, unless I may call you one. You were very kind to me the year before last in Paris. I know that doesn't mean much, but you told me to come and see you if ever I came to London, and I felt so lonely when I arrived here that I scribbled you a note yesterday. I haven't, to my knowledge, another acquaintance, even in town, and I don't know what to do."

"Do, my love!" retorted the vivacious Mrs. Paynter, although a little melted by the widow's melancholy tones. "Why, you must do just as well-jointured ladies in your position do. Make the best you can of life for a year or so, and then, perhaps, Cissy, my dear, we may find some one to take care of you."

Cissy Hemsworth paused for some few minutes as if lost in thought; at last, raising her head, she said, in a somewhat hesitating fashion:—

"But suppose I am not well-jointured?"

A slight expression of astonishment flashed across her visitor's face, and she replied, quietly:—

"Well, it is difficult to say, considering the establishment I last saw you at the head of, what your views may be on such a subject; but I should imagine, Cissy, that you are left pretty comfortably off."

Again the widow hesitated, and as the sun shone in upon the soft, girlish face, it seemed almost impossible to realize that she had been five years a wife. To Lizzie Paynter, who had seen somewhat of her brief married career, it seemed marvellous that she could retain such an appearance of innocence and freshness. That worldly-minded lady had seen poor Cissy in her Paris home,—mistress of a saloon frequented by *roués*, gamblers on the Bourse, and at times invaded by ladies with reputations not altogether unsmirched. Mrs. Paynter, Bohemian in her tastes, and by no means scrupulous with whom she mixed, had found Madame Hemsworth's receptions amus-

ing. That was quite sufficient for her. She liked to talk, to valse, to flirt, to be amused, and there was no house open to her during her sojourn in Paris in which she so readily attained this pleasant combination. Of course she paid great court to her hostess. In due return for her hospitality, in the first instance; because she really grew to like her, in the second. But Mrs. Paynter, to the very last, never could determine whether Cissy Hemsworth was the most innocent or most artful woman of her years that she had ever come across, and she was still undecided on this point. That her husband treated her with almost brutal indifference was palpable; but that she consoled herself for his neglect was at all events not visible. Yet she had no lack of admirers to choose from. Young, graceful, mistress of a handsome establishment, with a husband at no pains to conceal his want of regard for her, and in Paris, it would have been odd if there had not been plenty of aspirants for her favor. What was odd, was her superb indifference to all these danglers.

These baffled adorers declared Madame Hemsworth to be an animated iceberg, to be destitute of esprit, wit and humor. But if Cissy shone with no peculiar brilliancy in conversation, she was eminently graceful in her manner, she was always extremely well dressed, and showed quite sufficiency of tact. A beauty she was not exactly, but with a magnificent figure, a profusion of rich, dark hair, youth and good eyes, she might very well pass for one.

Deeper than any woman I ever met, or with a far-away love affair in the background, was Mrs. Paynter's final verdict, after much unavailing attempt to comprehend her friend's character during that Paris intimacy of some eighteen months or so ago, and great had been that lady's astonishment upon receiving a note the previous day from Cissy Hemsworth, requesting that she would call upon her. She had overlooked the notice of Mr. Hemsworth's death in the papers, and had no idea, till she arrived in Hanover street, that Cissy was now a widow.

"I think I had better tell you all," said Cissy, slowly, after a lengthened pause. "I have just a thousand pounds left in the world."

To say that Mrs. Paynter was astonished, would convey a very feeble notion of that lady's bewilderment; she was simply thunderstruck. That the widow of Mark Hemsworth, whose establishment in Paris, not two years ago, must have required something like four or five thousand a year to maintain, should assert that she had but a few hundreds left was inconceivable.

"My dear Cissy, what can you mean?" she exclaimed at last.

"What I say," replied the widow, quietly. "Mark was a very daring speculator, it appears, and I presume had been unfortunate of late. All I know is, that no sooner was his death noised abroad than creditors sprang up from all directions. I can't understand it even now. I ought to have had a settlement, they say; but it seems I had not. All I could make out was that everybody who had any claim upon him came before his wife. They said he had behaved disgracefully, and that my people must have been very foolish. If he has behaved badly to me, that, as I said before,

concerns nobody but me. All these people got their money, and more than their money, I believe."

"But are you sure, Cissy, that there was no settlement made upon you at the time of your marriage?" inquired Mrs. Paynter.

"I am told not. But I don't profess to understand it all. I don't think I ever should have got things settled at all, if it had not been for an English barrister, who turned up, I still scarcely know how."

"Ah! we are coming to a man amongst all the tangle at last," thought Mrs. Paynter. "I always knew there must be a 'him' in the background somewhere. An old friend, I suppose, Cissy."

"No, there you mistake," returned the widow. "I never saw him till about a fortnight before poor Mark's death."

"Poor Mark, indeed!" muttered Mrs. Paynter to herself; "a brute, a bear, and she pretends to regret him. What can she mean? And how did you make his acquaintance, then?"

"Really, I almost forget. Somebody brought him. You remember how people did come to my evenings. But he called afterwards, and when he saw what trouble I was in, he asked if he could be of any assistance. I was really so puzzled that I felt grateful for his offer, and told him so. Well he did—I don't know what he did, but at last he said if I would give him authority, he would do his best to put things straight for me, and the end of it all was he informed me that I had been grossly taken advantage of in every way, robbed in fact; that he unfortunately had interfered too late, but that there remained to me, out of the scramble, about a thousand pounds."

"And what do you mean to do now?" inquired Mrs. Paynter. "Marry the chivalrous barrister?"

"No," returned Mrs. Hemsworth, with a faint smile. "I don't think he's likely to ask me; but I suppose I must marry somebody before very long. What else can I do? I must have some one to take care of me."

She said this in quiet, matter-of-fact tones, as if marriage was to be adopted as a profession; spoke of it as a girl left in bad circumstances might talk of going out as a governess; as if there could be no difficulty about it; as if it was an affair that would come to pass a few months hence in the usual course of things. If Hanover street had been blocked up with suitors for her hand, she could not have alluded to taking a second husband with more complete calmness and assurance of its being so.

A thorough woman of the world was Mrs. Paynter, conversant with not a little of the wickedness of the world to boot, given to flirtations and other amusements that strait-laced people held highly indecorous. There was a strong dash of Bohemianism in her set; junketings to Cremorne in the summer months, and lively dinners down the river they specially affected.

It must not be supposed that Mrs. Paynter was a woman without the pale for one moment. That merry lady would go considerable lengths, and did dearly love to

make society hold up its hands, raise its eyebrows, and prophesy infinite tribulation, as the final result of her "goings on." But for all that, when society had called her a most outrageous flirt, stigmatized her as fast, flighty, and frivolous, society had alleged all that society was strictly entitled to state concerning her. Of course society insinuated rather more, and pitied the blindness of her unfortunate husband; but those who knew Mrs. Paynter best told a different story, and vowed that she was far too confirmed a flirt even to be capable of a *grande passion*. At all events, her easy-going husband seemed to understand her, and, though she would plunge into the most audacious flirtations at times under his very nose, never manifested the slightest symptoms of jealousy.

Of course, Mrs. Paynter had seen people in search of eligible matrimonial companions many times — had indeed lent assistance more than once to the riveting of the chains called by courtesy golden; albeit the occasional clanking of such chains on society's ear would now and then lead to reflections of their being at times composed of somewhat baser metal. But it did strike Mrs. Paynter that for cool, deliberate assertion of such purpose, she had never heard anything to equal Cissy Hemsworth.

The quiet audacity of the intention, too, rather amused her. This girl of twenty-two, widow of a fraudulent bankrupt, as it would seem, with just a thousand pounds left, and not an acquaintance in all London but herself, announced her design of marrying again, as if she had nothing in the world to do but sit in that pretty room in Hanover street till she gave permission to somebody (somebody peculiarly indefinite at the present) to carry her to St. George's Church, close by.

"Well, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Paynter, at length, "I am not going to say you are not right; but, Cissy, has it never occurred to you that husbands, to use a homely expression, don't grow on every bush? You are very attractive and charming and all that, and I am sure look wonderfully pretty in your mourning. But then you see it is a mercenary world that we live in, and the men — the wretches! — will inquire what sort of *dot* they are to get with their wives."

"Yes, I know it is so with many; but there are always some ready to take you for yourself — at least, I should think so. Don't you imagine, Lizzie, that as there are women who want taking care of, so there are also men who want some one to take care of?"

"No, indeed, I don't," rejoined Mrs. Paynter, bluntly.

"Oh, well, we shall see. It will be so with me," replied Cissy, dreamily, as she leant her cheek upon her hand.

"She's a fool — a downright fool," thought Mrs. Paynter. "She seems to think that Mrs. Hemsworth in lodgings in London, knowing nobody, occupies the same position as Madame Hemsworth, at the head of one of the pleasantest houses in Paris. That Cissy Hemsworth, with a few hundreds only remaining to her, is the same woman as Cissy Hemsworth, with carriages, servants, horses, and unlimited credit at Worth's. Well, it will be an awakening when it does come, and, poor thing, I shall

be sorry for her. How I ever could have thought her—thought what I did think about her. Deep—I feel ashamed of myself in face of such innocence."

"I must be going," observed Mrs. Paynter, at length, "but you must come and dine with us to-morrow. If I was not going out, I'd say to-night. I want you to know my husband. He always likes every one I like, and sometimes, though not often," she continued, with a little grimace, "some people I don't. He knows how kind you were to me in Paris, and that is quite sufficient to ensure his being particularly attentive to you. Good-by, dear; I must endeavor to find somebody to take care of you, for I really can't see how it is to come about unless I do."

"Oh, it will come time enough," returned Cissy, smiling, as she embraced her visitor.

"I am afraid she thinks me very foolish," mused the widow, as she gazed out of the window after Mrs. Paynter's carriage; "everybody always has. Father first, then my husband, and I wonder how many more of all those people in Paris. I am sure the men seemed to think me a perfect idiot; at all events, that I didn't know right from wrong, nor clap-trap sentiment from genuine love-making. I don't think I do know anything about the last, though I suppose there really is such a thing."

CHAPTER III.

NOTTINGHAM GOOSE FAIR.

It is doubtful whether any town in England boasts of a more magnificent market-place than Nottingham. See it on an ordinary week-day, and you will own it is a noble square. See it on a market-day, and you will reflect what a deal of business must be doing amongst that busy crowd. Nothing to be seen much then of the lace-makers, stocking-weavers, etc., which represent so large a portion of the industry of the metropolis of the dukeries. The agriculturists, on such occasions, seem to have it all their own way, and you would deem corn, stock, and wool the special commodities in which Nottingham deals. No sign much of that great manufacturing population that, after all, makes Nottingham the city that it is. A somewhat rough, out-spoken people these last when excited about election matters—not yet quite forgotten a taste for prize-fighting, and other barbaric pastimes of that nature, but withal showing rapid signs of succumbing to more gentle culture. A disposition for the cultivation of roses, and the more peaceful relaxation of fishing, decidedly visible amongst those tempestuous weavers of late. The former in great measure attributable, perhaps, to a famous rose-grower of those parts, whose delightful books would make any one believe that the production of a perfect bloom is to taste unfathomable bliss.

But to see Nottingham market-place in its glory, you must see it during the saturnalia of its goose fair; when the pens are filled with the famous bird of the capitol. Small, poor, draggled geese, that have been travelled there from remote parts of Ireland, are penned next to big, bumptious, corpulent birds, that are fresh from the Lincolnshire fenlands; stubble-fed, white-plumed, strong fellows, with a great deal to say for themselves, casting a contemptuous eye on their poor Irish cousins. No beasts, no sheep in the market town now, nothing but geese — geese everywhere — and you carry not home a Michaelmas goose with you, well, you have not done what Nottingham expects of you.

Shows there are everywhere. Fat ladies, learned pigs, giants, dwarfs, merry-go-rounds, canvas galleries wherein you shoot for nuts with a gun that must be constructed with a curve in it, so far does it project its steel-tipped dart to the right or left of the target. Theatres of the kind to which Richardson has bequeathed his immortal name, — or is that vagrant Thespian still tramping it in the flesh like another wandering Jew? Wild beast shows, Wombwell's — the original Wombwell's — no connection with Wombwell's — with the hairless horse of the Pampas, with the three-horned rhinoceros, with the only black South American panther ever exhibited. Sound the trumpets, beat the drums, — "Here you are, now's your time! All in, and a-going to begin *im*mediately. Walk up, ladies and gentlemen. This performance is unparalleled — it never was paralleled — it never can be paralleled — that it should ever be paralleled is a parabolical impossibility. What is sixpence for such an unparalleled exhibition? Dash me, but I'd rather lend you the money than you should miss this unparalleled opportunity."

Cackle, cackle, cackle, go the bipeds in feathers, gabble, gabble, gabble, go the bipeds without, and from the great market-place of Nottingham one stupendous babble resounds through the air, and proclaims that "the goose fair" is in full blast, — a wild confusion that might drive a quiet stranger well-nigh out of his senses. Nottingham, too, is all abroad — in high spirits, in every sense of the term — here with a laugh and a jest in it, there with a hiccup and a reel in it, but merry, yes, decidedly merry, whether treating its sweetheart to the shows, or treating its cronies to beer or strong waters. For it is a *fête* day at Nottingham this, and her citizens of all kinds respond nobly to her summons to give themselves up to diversion, and let labor go hang for the present. Apt indeed to let labor go hang on this occasion considerably longer than is good for those dependent on them. Like much more saturnalia, it opens with feasting and finishes with fasting in many a household.

At a corner of the market-place, evidently not the least dismayed by the turmoil around him, stands on the top of the bench a plump little, dark man, indulging in most voluble harangue to the crowd that surrounds him; a sleek, clean-shaved, little man, with a keen, twinkling black eye, and an expression of such imperturbable good-humor and self-satisfaction, that a lounger with money in his pockets would have felt almost impelled to spend a trifle with him. He was of the Cheap Jack genus

— dealing apparently in everything, and was vaunting his wares with a flow of language that seemed inexhaustible.

"Why won't I part with this here valuable cameo? Why not, indeed? Now, I'll tell you: cos I've just got a telegraph from the Empress of Peru to say she'll take it on my own terms — 'Your own terms, Mr. Turbottle,' that's what the orgust lady says; but I always have dealt straight with Nottingham, and I always will. Spring sixpence, say four shillings, and the brooch is yours, sir. What, you won't? Well, I've a good mind to give it away. But come, I can do better with you than that. Short of money, are you? That's what's the matter, is it? Blessed if I didn't fancy it might be so. Trade's trade, says I, and money must be turned over somehow. What constitootes the prosperity of England? Why, trade. Block thesources of trade, and you bust up, that's what you do. Now, look here, this is a half-sovereign, this is, no nonsense about it, a genuine half-sovereign. I'm going to sell a lot of them at nine shillings apiece, just to put a little heart in you. Who'll have the first? What, you're afraid, are you? Now, sir, you look like a man with an account at your banker s; just oblige me by examining that article."

The lounger addressed was a tall, dark-bearded man, attired in a shooting-jacket and low-crowned hat, who, together with a companion, had been idly listening with much apparent amusement to the voluble discourse of Mr. Turbottle. Thus appealed to he stepped forward and took the proffered half-sovereign, examined it carefully, and, with a laugh, said, "Good enough for me — there's your nine shillings."

"Thank you, sir," replied Mr. Turbottle, gracefully lifting his hat. "It's a comfort to get some one to believe in one anyhow, in this here stiff-necked, incredulous city. Now, you scoffers, and scorners, you hear what the gentleman says. Who's for the next? Here you are again, — a real, genuine half-sovereign for nine shillings. I'm bound to sell if I can; so let's be quick and have done with 'em. You can't expect me to waste time over a losing lot like this."

Here a country-looking fellow took heart and purchased a half-sovereign, amid considerable interest and misgiving amongst the crowd. But this, too, was perfectly genuine, and readily converted into ten shillings at an adjoining shop. The demand for half-sovereigns at nine shillings apiece waxed brisk, and Mr. Turbottle had no occasion to make use of his oratory in furtherance of his trade for the present, and in every instance did the purchased coin prove a veritable half-sovereign.

But that worthy after disposing of a dozen on these terms, curtly announced that he had no more.

"Not my fault, gentlemen," he exclaimed, "I took all they had at the Bank of England; but as the manager says, — says he to me, 'Mr. Turbottle,' — which these are his words, — 'you know what Nottingham Goose Fair is — you know there's nothing like it in all England; and there aint. Well, Mr. Turbottle, it draws us dry, — that's wot it does, — and if there was any call in particklar on the nation that week — well, Mr. Tur-

bottle, the nation would bust up, that's what it would do, unless Nottingham came to the front, which in course we both know Nottingham alway has and alway will.'"

As he uttered the above, he was busied about the packages in front of him, for he had descended from his elevation while disposing of the half-sovereigns. At last he had apparently got things to his satisfaction, for he once more jumped up on his bench and exclaimed: —

"Now, my independent citizens, here you are again. Talk about buying half-sovereigns at nine shillings apiece, that aint good enough for *you*. It aint good enough for *me*, — shall I tell you why? If I can't make my fortune quick, I aint agoing to take twelve months to get ruined. That's where it is. Sudden death, says I, and no dying by slow consumption. It'd take me a year or two to get through my property at that rate. Now you see this? What is it? Why, a toasting-fork, aint it? It s not a very good un, it aint a very bad un. Now, I'll sell this for one shilling, neither more nor less. Too much, — wait a moment, and hear me out. Who says a shilling for the toasting-fork, and I'll give the buyer half a crown for luck, and if that hurts you, you are sensitive. What, you'll have it? There you are, my dear, and if the fork aint all it should be, the half-crown 'll make up for it."

The crowd flocked around the giggling, blushing country-girl who had purchased, and once more were they nonplussed; whatever you might think of the toasting-fork, the half-crown was unmistakably as genuine as the half-sovereigns. Nobody was perhaps more amused at this new development of the game of humbugging your neighbors, than that black-bearded lounger, who had bought the first half-sovereign.

A shrewd and rising London barrister, Montague Gore, had come down to Nottingham on professional business, and so found himself a spectator of the Goose Fair.

"Stay," he exclaimed to his companion, who manifested signs of impatience. "We have nothing to do now, you know, but enjoy the humors of the fair. It's not often I get a holiday. I am curious to see how this clever scamp proposes to recoup himself. One can't suppose that he intends the crowd he has collected to go away scatheless. You're no fisherman, Fox, or you would understand what ground-baiting a hole means. That is what this man is doing just now; but, my life on it, he sticks the hook pretty sharply into some of their gills before he's done with 'em."

"Think the whole thing rather a bore myself," replied Mr. Fox Brine; "most things are; still I don't know that witnessing that sleek little ruffian in grass-green, with the gold-banded hat, consummate his elaborate villany would weary me more than anything else. Stay! Certainly, by all means, if it interests you — always stay when anything does that. I can't say I feel any curiosity about his fraudulent proceedings (they're sure to become fraudulent) at present; but I may. Having bought that half-sovereign below its current value, he will probably appeal to you to bail him out, when the indignant public hand him over to the police. The present public, by the way, are likely, I should imagine, to pound him to a jelly, as soon as they discover his of course ultimate intention of getting the best of them."

"Listen to him," replied Gore; "look, he puts up a frying-pan."

"Here you are again, — a frying-pan that takes the change out of nature altogether — a pan, bless you, that multiplies the rasher you put into it. An article like this wants no talking about. Going for one shilling. I'll take neither more nor less, and I've a present for whoever buys it," cried Mr. Turbottle. "What is it? Well, it's not as heavy as the income tax, nor as light as most of your pockets. Who'll have the frying-pan? Thank you, sir, and there's that invaluable article, and a bright new shilling to boot in exchange for your own dirty one. Here you are again; quick, always go on when you're in luck; it's real bargains I'm selling you. Go on? — yes, I'm bound to go on; who ever heard of any one pulling up on the road to ruin? Dash it all! let me get it over. Here's-half a-dozen plates; who takes them at a shilling, with faith in my generosity? Now, don't stop, thinking about it; I'll grow avaricious if I'm kept waiting."

Again was the stipulated shilling tendered, and this time Mr. Turbottle threw in a glass bottle, evidently quite worth the money. In a similar manner he disposed of some half-dozen more lots, but all manifestly to the buyer's advantage considerably. The crowd gathered thicker and thicker round the bench from which such good things were distributed.

"Bah!" exclaims Mr. Turbottle, at last; "getting monotonous, aint it? We'll change the game, eh?

"'Safe to win when I begin,
Tommy Dodd! Tommy Dodd!
Glasses round, cigars as well;
Tommy Dodd! Tommy Dodd!

"'Now, my boys, we'll all go in,
Tommy Dodd! Tommy Dodd!
We'll clean him out — yes, just about;
Hurrah for Tommy Dodd!'"

It is impossible to describe the unction with which Mr. Turbottle trolled out this flash music-hall chorus to his hearers, or to express on paper the humorous wink he favored them with as he concluded it.

"Tommy Dodding again, my dears. Lor, wot a game it is! Here's the next investment in the programme. Making your fortin aint accomplished by looking on, and I shan't manage a ruining of myself if you don't tumble up to buy quicker than you've been doing, you know. Here you are! What is it? Well, it's a lucifer match; and I don't warrant it to go off unless you hold it to your sweetheart's eyes, and then, if he's true to you, rockets aint nothing to it. I'm going to sell sixty of these matches, invented by Professor Pelligrinismolensko, at sixpence a piece; and I'll give you a silver thimble in. No sale till I get sixty sixpences. Money returned if

there are only fifty-nine. Now, young ladies, this *is* your chance. If you can't trust your sweethearts, don't buy, that's my advice to you. What's a silver thimble compared to a sore heart? Quite right, sir; don't let her buy one," he suddenly exclaimed, pointedly addressing a rough-looking countryman, with a fresh, rosy-cheeked girl clinging to him. "My lucifers won't go off at such eyes as yours; they've been wandering all round the fair."

A roar of laughter welcomed this little personality. It always does upon such occasions, and is one of the usual tricks of these traders.

"I'm a good mind to breaak every boane in his body, Molly," growled the assailed, with all the natural urbanity of the English agriculturist.

"Hush, Tom, hush!" whispered the girl, nudging him. "I'm going to buy a match."

"If thee does, thou'rt a fool," replied her lover in a hoarse whisper.

What will not woman dare in pursuit of such dangerous intelligence? Despite her lover's rough remonstrance, Molly, nothing doubting and curious, led the way. Both men and women swarmed up to follow her example. In less than ten minutes at least eighty people were walking away with a lucifer match and a small, elaborately done-up parcel, supposed to contain the silver thimble. The trade was brisk past conception, and, relaxing from his oratory, Mr. Turbottle gravely supplied his customers with matches.

But, clear of the crush, Molly opened her parcels, as did many others, and it became manifest at once that these thimbles were of Brummagen manufacture, and with slight pretension to silver; being, in good sooth, worth at the outside about a penny a piece. Then slowly but surely rose a murmur of wrath against the vendor, in which those who had profited by his previous sales joined quite as readily as those who were the victims of his last exposition of the interesting game of Tommy Dodd. Did they expect that the benevolent Turbottle was never to sell except at a dead loss? It seemed so. For cries of Sharper! Robber! Cheat! commenced to be rife among the crowd. Still Turbottle seemed equal to the occasion.

"Come, my turbulent pippins," cried that orator, once more mounting his bench, "you mus'nt cry out before you're hurt. If them thimbles aint silver, they'd deceive the Prince of Wales himself,—which here's long life to him! How about the matches? You can't try 'em except in the dark. There's no deception about them. Mark my words, you men who's dissatisfied are afraid of your sweethearts' lighting 'em,—that's what you are. You can't except to play Tommy Dodd always on your side, can you? Here we are again. You've had your turn; I've had mine. Now I'll tell you what I'll do with you."

"And I'll show you what I'll do with you, mister," growled an ominous voice from just below the speaker's post of vantage.

It was the cross-grained laborer, upon whom Mr. Turbottle had exercised his humor,

that spoke. He had a sullen, savage expression in his face that boded mischief. A common type of his class, excess of beer went through an established course of fermentation within him; four distinct stages of intoxication invariably visible, the supply of malt not being cut off, the loquacious, the quarrelsome, the boisterous and jocular, and the maudlin. He had only attained the second phase of beer at present, and consequently was in the mood to resent Mr. Turbottle's jokes fiercely. Utterly ignoring his sweetheart's successful purchase of the toasting-fork, he deemed that the little disappointment concerning the silver thimble was due warrant for giving vent to his wrath; and, despite Molly's entreaties, had pushed his way back through the crowd for the express purpose of what he termed "having a settlement with that green-coated chap."

"Nonsense, my man," retorted Mr. Turbottle, loftily, "if you go for bargains at public auctions, you gets 'em or you doesn't, as is very well known. Your young woman anyways has no call to find fault. That'll do, I ain't going to have you coming up here."

But whether Mr. Turbottle was going to have it or not apparently did not rest with Mr. Turbottle. The countryman, with his heavy frame and brawny shoulders, was hardly to be kept at bay by the plump little pedler. Luckily help was at hand.

"Come on, Fox," exclaimed Montague Gore. "I won't see our little friend put upon by that great hulking brute," and he pushed his way rapidly towards the bench which formed Mr. Turbottle's rostrum.

"Where Don Quixote leads, I suppose Sancho Panza must follow," replied Fox Brine, quietly. "How nice you'll look in court with a black eye next Wednesday, philanthropically gathered, too, in preventing a cheap jack from receiving the due reward of his mendacity! Push on; when you sober people do make fools of yourselves you always go in a cracker, *I* have observed."

By the time they had worked their way through the crowd to the centre of action, it was evident that the countryman was not without supporters. In vain did Mr. Turbottle appeal to the British spirit of *fair* play. There was an undeniable disposition apparent to handle him roughly and capsize his stand. It was useless for him to argue they could not expect that there should be no blanks among the prizes; that they could hardly suppose he was always to be disposing of his wares at considerable sacrifice; that he must have his little innings at the game of Tommy Dodd as well as themselves. They did not see it, and they were not to be induced to see it. He had said he meant to ruin himself. Well, they would take care he should be for the present, pretty effectually. Nottingham affected not to understand chaff in his case, and repudiated all notion that his statements should be taken otherwise than *en vérité*. It promised to go hard with Mr. Turbottle, when Montague Gore and his friend suddenly appeared by that disconsolate trader's side.

"Come, my men," exclaimed Gore; "no violence. You've nothing to complain of. If he had the best of the last venture, you had the pull of those before."

"Who be you, I'd loike to know?" retorted Tom, grimly, thrusting himself forward.

"I must trouble you, my clumsy friend, to mind where you are putting your hoofs," observed Fox Brine, in his most nonchalant manner.

"I'll be putting 'em on your faace, my foine fellow, if you doan't quit that," rejoined the countryman, fiercely.

"My good man, you'd really better go home. I shall be put to the trouble of knocking you down if you're insolent, and the police will most likely take you up for creating a disturbance if you assault our little friend here."

All the savage instincts of the countryman's nature were roused by Brine's contemptuous retort. He lowered his head and rushed in on his opponent like a bull. But Fox Brine had been an athletic in his university days, and had learned, among other diversions of that nature, to use his fists. The old training and his constitutional coolness stood him in good stead now. It all happened in a moment, but the countryman's rush was stopped by a quick one, two, that threw his head up, and before he'd time to recover himself, what the fancy would designate as a neat upper cut caught him just under the chin, made his teeth rattle like a box of dominoes, and stretched him half senseless on the ground.

The situation still looked awkward for Mr. Turbottle and his champions, but the mob hesitated as mobs always do on receiving a prompt repulse in the first instance. Before the redoubtable Tom was reinstated on his feet the police intervened, and that hero was given into custody by Fox Brine for assault. His followers disappeared with exceeding rapidity, and Mr. Turbottle and his allies were left masters of the field.

"A bad business, very," exclaimed the little man, shaking his head.

"Confound it!" rejoined Montague Gore; "I don't think you've much cause to complain. If it hadn't been for my friend here, you were likely to have been in a parlous state before another five minutes had gone by."

"Gentlemen, I thank you both much. If it hadn't been for your interference, I don't deny but it might have gone a little rough upon me. But you see my pitch is done for the day. I'll sell nothing more here this afternoon, and I'd have done a deal in duffer brooches, ear-rings, and so on, if it hadn't been for this here unlucky misunderstanding, which it can't be helped, anyway. They were rising, too, beautiful. All the salt had taken extraordinary well. Beg pardon, gents, but that's what we call the bargains we always begin with."

"Well, come up to the 'George,' and ask for me, as soon as you have packed up your traps; there's my card. You can start again in the evening, you know," said Gore.

"That's so," responded Mr. Turbottle, blithely. "I'll look in and thank you kindly, gentlemen both."

"Think our friend will turn out amusing in the social circle?" inquired Fox Brine, as they walked away.

"I can't say, but I am curious to have a talk with him. As for you, Fox, who are always about to perpetrate a novel or a drama, you ought to regard him as a study. He may prove quite a valuable character for you."

Fox Brine made no reply. Gore's remark exactly described him. A clever man, whom his friends were always expecting to do something; but he had never done it. He had projected novels and plays without end; but unfortunately he always stopped there. He never worked out these conceptions. He was always whispering promising plots, tremendous tableaux, and striking situations, into the ears of his intimates; but the eggs never got hatched somehow. It was said of him that he was a man of ideas, and that his nearest approach to becoming a veritable author had been the writing of a preface for a novel which he had never commenced. Possessed of just sufficient means to scramble along on as a bachelor in chambers, Fox Brine never could harden his heart and sit down really to work. Had he been a poorer man, he might perhaps have made his mark and achieved some success in literature. As it was, he had got no further than always intending to do so. There were times when he half believed that he really was doing something — when he got out sheets of paper and sketched out wondrous stories and plays. Then he would talk complacently to his friends of these, as things done, but they never were done; never, indeed, got further than this. Still Fox Brine always considered himself affiliated to literature.

Musing over his friend Gore's last remark, he felt now quite prepared to accept Mr. Turbottle from an artistic point of view.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. TURBOTTLE'S STORY.

SATIATED with the humors of the Goose Fair, Gore and Fox Brine were whiling away an hour over a cigar in the George Hotel, preparatory to an early dinner, when Mr. Turbottle was announced.

The little man had evidently indulged in much brushing and ablution since the adventure of the morning, and raised his gold-banded hat with a most jaunty air as he entered the room. There was something irresistibly comic in his appearance: in the bright-green coat, with its gilt buttons, in the rather high shirt-collar, in the twinkling black eyes, in his generally plump, jovial figure. You felt certain that if there was nothing particularly funny in what he said, there would be in his way of saying it.

We have all seen this. We have all met noted *causeurs*, renowned for the humor of their story-telling. As a rule their stories have very little in them. It is the way

they tell them. It is not till the neophyte narrates the tale he has learned from their lips that you see how much it owed to the original teller.

"I have looked in, gentlemen both, agreeable to invitation. Mr. Gore, sir, allow me to thank you once more for interfering in my favor; also the t'other gentleman, whose name I haven't the pleasure of knowing, but who popped in in his right so handily at the critical moment."

"Sit down, Mr. Turbottle, and have something to wash the dust out of your throat."

"Thank you, sir, thank you. Something cooling would be grateful. The ingratitude of the populace is still sticking in my gizzard. To think of their turning rusty over the match trick. The unruly passions of the multitude are always upsetting trade, which is the science of doing or being done by your neighbors. The great game of Tommy Dodd requires level temper on the part of all parties concerned."

"But," rejoined Fox Brine, "it might occur to a gentleman of your powers of observation that the British public is wont to wax wroth when he finds himself done."

"What business has the B. P. to do anything of the sort. They couldn't suppose I was going to lose money by 'em all day," retorted Mr. Turbottle, hotly; "I act strictly on principle. I sells 'em bargains to start with to establish a connection, and then I sells 'em precious hard bargains to make my living by afterwards. They needn't buy unless they like — there's their remedy. They aint no business to cut up lumpy cos they don't always win, that's what I say;" and the little man threw himself back in his chair with the air of a man who has propounded a regular clincher.

"Were you always in your present line?" inquired Gore, much amused at his guest's theory of trade. "By the way, what do you call yourself?"

Mr. Turbottle sat straight up in his chair, looked his interlocutor very direct in the face, like a man who felt that his statement might be challenged.

"I am a travelling merchant, sir, although the ribald multitude usually think fit to call me a 'Cheap Jack.' That for the ribald multitude, as a rule," continued the little man, snapping his fingers; "but they had me this morning, and no mistake."

It had struck Brine more than once that there was some incongruity in this man's talk. Sometimes, though rather inflated, his language was so much better than at others.

"But you were not always a — a — cheap — I mean travelling merchant, were you?"

"No," replied Mr. Turbottle, "no, my noble gladiator, I wasn't. I've tried a many trades in my time. I began life on this very circuit as a boother. But I suppose I hadn't what they call histrionic talent, for I never rose very high in that profession. My manager paid me the compliment of saying, that nobody ever learnt his words quicker or delivered them worse than I did. He said I hadn't voice enough, but thought if I'd study up for the big drum, I'd make myself heard. Well, I thought a

pound a week for towelling the sheepskin wasn't a big thing to look forward to; besides it spoils your carriage, you know, and I always went in for elegance in those days, so I told him that wasn't good enough for me."

"Might we inquire what did seem good enough in your eyes?" asked Fox Brine, with just a touch of sarcasm in his tone.

There was an angry flush on Mr. Turbottle's face as he replied: —

"Yes, gentlemen, I don't mind telling what my life's been, unless I'm a-boring people."

If he hadn't seen Brine develop in the morning that there was plenty of the real grit in him, the little man would have probably stopped short in his communicativeness. Like most of his class, he had a perfect horror of being drawn out for the amusement of what he called a swell, when off his rostrum. There it was fair give and take. You drew him out then at your own risk, and required to be a past master of chaff to hold your own; but here it was different.

Montague Gore saw something of this, and at once interposed.

"Let me order another glass of that mixture for you, Mr. Turbottle, and then, if it isn't asking too much of you, to tell us a little more of your adventurous career, you will be conferring a real favor on the pair of us."

Mr. Turbottle's indignation was easily appeased, and having been supplied with a fresh jorum of his favorite beverage, he immediately continued: —

"Well, gentlemen, when the big drum is the only thing put before you as a career, selection is difficult. I went as assistant to a tobacconist in this very town. I knew as much of the business, at all events, as I did of the big drum. My master had two daughters, the elder, plain and practical; the younger, a beauty, and frivolous. I fell in love with the younger, and she with a young artillery officer quartered here. She went off with him, and then the elder married me, because she chose to do so. I never did quite know how it came about, but she made a real good wife as long as she lived, poor soul. Here's her health, anyway," said the little man, plaintively, "though she was a bit aggravating at times. But she kept me straight, gentlemen. She wouldn't have no late hours, — not she. None of your 'jolly companions every one,' nor anything of that sort would she stand. Well, I went on Tommy Dodding in that line for some years, selling prime Havanas at fourpence, which I got from Liverpool for a penny, and did well. It's a paying business, is the cigar trade, if you've got a connection; and ours was not a bad un. Then the old man died, which he had got that contrarious of late years, it was getting time he took hisself off to something that suited him better, and about five years back, my old lady followed him. 'Timothy,' says she to me, at the last, 'you'll never get along in the cigar line without me; you'd better give up the business and try something else.' I took her advice, and did; but I think she was wrong, I've never settled to anything since. I've tried half-a-dozen trades, and have been for the last eighteen months in my present one."

"Thank you," replied Gore. "I suppose you always travel the circuit?"

"As a rule, yes, sir; I'm as reg'lar as if I belonged to the Midland Bar. Warwick, Derby, Leeds, I've a turn at 'em all at times. I've many a friends in this town, and only I missed my usual pitch, you'd not have seen 'em turn lumpy as they did this morning. They didn't quite know me at that end of the market-place. Wish you good-day, gentlemen."

Both his entertainers rose and shook hands with him, a compliment at which the little man was much gratified, and with wishes expressed on both sides that they might meet again ere long, Mr. Turbottle and his hat, it really did seem a most important part of him, took their departure.

"Which is he, Monte," asked Brine, as their guest's steps died away in the distance, "most knave or fool?"

"He's certainly no fool, and in spite of his peculiar commercial ideas I don't think he is a knave. He's a rare study for you, my artistic friend. My belief is this, that though he would do you unscrupulously in the way of business — he has already told us you must do or be done — you would otherwise find him a perfectly honest, conscientious man. He struck me as one of the most singular combinations of shrewdness and simplicity I have ever met."

"Did he? I only wish he had interested me half as much. He merely struck me as one of the most loquacious, drinking old fools I ever came across."

"No wonder you don't get on in your trade, Fox, if you can't see material when you come across it."

It was rather unkind. It was piercing Brine in the most sensitive part of his cuticle to insinuate that he could overlook character in any shape; then to mix up with it the self-evident truism that he had not got on in his profession. He undoubtedly professed literature, and undoubtedly could point to no work satisfactorily achieved in that direction; but did not every one know that he only did so in a dilettante way? And yet it was sometimes a sore subject with Fox Brine that he had done nothing. It was not that he had tried and failed — it was simply he had lacked energy to try. The belief in himself had not as yet been knocked out of him, and our capabilities in literature we usually rate pretty high, till failure has convinced us that we are not quite the shining lights we once thought ourselves.

"I can quite agree with you, Montie," he rejoined, lazily, at length, speaking indeed with more than usual deliberation, as self-contained men are apt to do, when their assailant's arrow has hit the bull's-eye. "He's but a type of his class — no unusual one, I fancy."

"But what an eccentric class it is for one thing; you're wrong about him, I suspect for another; he's not a common specimen. There's a story behind what we have heard, I'd lay my life. If we could have ventured to inquire the fate of the runaway sister, for instance."

"He'd have known nothing," returned Brine. "Her history, probably, would be

that of most young women who have run away with men socially above themselves, — bad to investigate."

"You'll never be a novelist, Fox, or a dramatist. You are wanting in imagination. I believe I could have been both if I had ever had time to go in for it."

"Most people do; and when they go in for it, they become aware that it's not quite so easy a business as they deemed it. The reviewers disabuse their souls of infatuation with small ceremony. Reviewing must be rather jolly," continued Brine, meditatively; "you pitch in with no risk of being pitched into."

"Pooh! the critics do their duty to the best of their ability. They have a good deal of rubbish to adjudicate upon, and can do no less than say that they think it so."

"Yes; but when it happens to be your rubbish, you'd like to argue the point with them."

"Of course," replied Gore, laughing; "but I am afraid the public would not care to hear that argument. At all events editors don't think they would. But here's dinner, and by the time we have finished it our train will be pretty well due."

"Hum! sole result of Nottingham Goose Fair, which, you villain, you swore was amusing, is that I have ascertained I have not quite lost the art of boxing. As well, perhaps, I met a most unscientific antagonist, or I might have been much less pleased with myself."

And, with this philosophical reflection, Mr. Fox Brine seated himself at table.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. PAYNTER AT HOME.

Mrs. Paynter was mistress of a very pretty house out by the Regent's park; and there was no pleasanter lounge in all London, vowed those privileged of the *entrée*. The hostess had a large and heterogeneous acquaintance. There were her husband's city friends, who somehow never felt quite at their ease in her bright drawing-rooms; there were her own rather Bohemian acquaintance, composed principally of artists, authors, two or three theatrical ladies, rising barristers, etc., but mostly people with something in them — with talent, if it was only that of making themselves disagreeable. Either man or woman who can do that has established a footing in society. Every one abuses them; but then every one invites them for fear of the consequences of leaving them out. Then there were stray people whom Mrs. Paynter had picked up on the Continent, and in divers places. That lady repudiated exclusiveness, and was utterly indifferent as to what public opinion might murmur regarding her receptions. She numbered, too, a few of society's *crême de la crême* on her visiting list — men principally, it must be admitted; but these were rather proud of the *entrée* of Mrs. Paynter's

salon, and would often throw over very grand invitations indeed for one of Lizzie's charade parties, little dinners down the river, or gay dances. She never gave balls; but what she airily denominated "just a valse or two on the carpet and supper," was worth a dozen regular balls.

It is the pleasantest time of the year in London, — the beginning of October; just a crackle of frost in the morning air, perhaps to be followed by bright sunshine and a crisp atmosphere; much ozone in these early October days that quickens the blood in the veins, and makes the pulses tingle. Men are dropping back from the long vacation, bronzed and braced from moor and mountain; refreshed, regenerated from strand and stream. Hearty hand-grips are being exchanged in street and chambers, as the busy toilers of professional London once more put their necks to the collar.

Mrs. Paynter designates this the theatrical season. She is particularly fond of making up little cosey parties for an early dinner, and a box at the theatre afterwards — a quartette which her husband may join if he thinks fit, is Mrs. Paynter's idea of seeing the drama. John Paynter thinks theatricals rather a bore, and seldom takes advantage of such opportunity. To get up anything like a dinner for the widow was, of course, preposterous; her crape was as yet too deep to admit of her joining in such festivity. But just two cavaliers to take care of them to the Gayety, she surely couldn't mind that. She could sit as far back in the box as she liked, and really she could have nothing but the proprieties to think about. It was quite impossible she could have had any regard for Mark Hemsworth; and, at all events, there had been three months to get over such regrets as might have been.

Mrs. Paynter, reflecting in this wise as she drove away from Hanover street, on arriving at her own house, thought she could do no better than scribble a couple of notes. The first came glibly enough, and was directed to Captain Detfield, of Her Majesty's Guards. He was her favored cavalier for the time being, and, as she knew he was in town, who shall say how much that fact had to do with the programme she was making out for Cissy Hemsworth's delectation?

"Now," muttered Mrs. Paynter to herself, "comes the difficulty. Who's to be the other? As far as a dangler to flirt with for the night goes, there's half a dozen I might write to, and they generally come when *I* send for them if they can; but I should like to put a substantial admirer in her way at once if I could, — some one that would do for a husband if she subjugated him; and if the way the men ran after her in Paris may be taken as a test, she'll not want adorers here. Dear me, who shall I get? There's Mr. Bruffles, — he's awfully rich and awfully stupid; but then Cissy can't expect everything. No, he won't do; at all events for to-night. Charlie Detfield always makes such fun of him, and though he don't see much, I think he does see that. Old Sir Marmaduke Rivers, — dreadful old man! — he's on the look-out for a third wife; — but I'm not sure he's in town. Stop, I have it! Montague Gore, if I can catch him, — he's the man. He is really nice, and they say making over two thousand a year now, and his practice increasing every day; not very impressible though,"

mused Lizzie, with some recollection of having signally failed upon one occasion to entangle that gentleman in a flirtation, — a rebuff that she had always felt a little aggrieved about, although they still remained good friends; but a woman never quite forgives a man for having been insensible to her fascinations, and Lizzie Paynter always felt she should be tempted to make another assault, if opportunity offered. Not that she was smitten with him, but he had declined to take advantage of the opening she had given him at a certain water-picnic a year ago, — instead of flirting with her he had been simply courteous and polite, — insensibly stupid, Mrs. Paynter called it. That lady had far too good an opinion of her personal attractions to believe a man could really refuse such a challenge from her, save on the score of great density, or want of *savoir vivre*.

"Yes, he will do. I suppose he always carries his musty old law business in his head, which accounts for his not comprehending us. I will write to him."

As Lizzie Paynter glides into her drawing-room to be in readiness to receive her guests, she certainly looks as if she had fair grounds for being wrathful with any man who might refuse to do homage to her charms. Tall and fair, with a lovely complexion, limpid blue eyes, and a very pretty mouth, she is decidedly a very attractive woman; just at the age, too, when a woman is in the meridian of her beauty, and thoroughly understands making the very most of her personal advantages. With plenty to say for herself, and spirits that rarely flag, no wonder that Lizzie Paynter is popular. She is, undoubtedly, with men, and to a certain extent with her own sex, for she is good-natured. But then she has terrible piratical tendencies. She is much given to lure both husbands and lovers from their allegiance. She is coquette from the crown of her head to the rosettes on her slippers, and would flirt with an archbishop if placed next him at dinner. She never got hurt herself in all this irregular warfare. She could get so sweetly sentimental, and fancy, for the time being, that she was really deeply interested, — it was the main business of her life; but she never lost her head, nor made the mistake of falling seriously in love. Her husband probably understood her; at all events he was of a phlegmatic disposition, and took her escapades easily. Scrapes, of course, she now and then got into. Admirers would, occasionally, become too much in earnest, and that was awkward. She was a clever woman in her way, and rather enjoyed a scene, perhaps, than otherwise, providing there were no spectators; but then, as she would say, plaintively, "Men will be so foolish sometimes, you know," and occasionally she had gone so far as to be unable to recede without some difficulty.

Lizzie is musing over her programme. She has had no answer from Montague Gore, which a little troubles her. True, the invitation was so short that she could scarcely expect one. She has not heard from Charlie Detfield; but that doesn't discompose her at all. She would have had a note ere this, had he been on Her Majesty's employ, — the only duty she allowed as excuse for failing in duty to herself.

"But if Mr. Gore doesn't come, it will be awkward. I shall have to make John come. One gentleman to two ladies is so eminently unsatisfactory.

At this moment the door opened, and Cissy Hemsworth swept into the room, and Lizzie advanced to meet her.

"So very glad to see you, dear. You are to look upon this house as you taught me to regard yours in Paris the year before last, — one where I was always welcome, come when I would."

"You are very kind to me," replied Cissy, softly; "but then I knew you would be."

"This is my husband," continued Mrs. Paynter, "and this, John, is the Mrs. Hemsworth, who I told you made Paris Elysium for me the last time I was there."

John Paynter welcomed the young widow in genuine hearty fashion. It was quite sufficient for him that anybody had been kind or even civil to his wife to insure that much at his hands, for, in his quiet, undemonstrative way, he was strongly attached to his vivacious partner. But Cissy had a further claim upon him. He knew that she was left unprotected, and also in indifferent circumstances, and that appealed irresistibly to a man of his generous, chivalrous nature.

As a matter of course, Lizzie had taken this opportunity to run her guest over. How well she looks, and how beautifully she is dressed, she thought. I never could have imagined that widow's weeds could be so becoming. I declare I think she never looked handsomer; but here the thread of her meditations was severed by the announcement of Captain Detfield.

Ten minutes' desultory conversation, and then Mrs. Paynter announced that she would wait no longer for Mr. Gore. With a theatrical engagement afterwards it would be absurd, she said, to say nothing of having had no answer from him.

"Who's the widow?" asked Charlie Detfield, as they ascended to the dining-room.

"Didn't I tell you, sir, I had something to show you, and isn't she worth looking at? You're only to admire, you know, not worship. You've quite enough to do in that way at present, recollect."

"Is it likely that I should forget? Is it likely that I should admire any other woman in your presence?" whispered the guardsman, sentimentally.

Mrs. Paynter looked at him for a moment, and, as they entered the dining-room, retorted: —

"Yes; I think you're quite capable of it."

Charlie Detfield laughed; that scapegrace guardsman could take very fair care of himself. He was always engaged in a desperate flirtation with some woman or other; perhaps rather harder hit than usual just now; but the pair were not badly matched, though Lizzie Paynter was a cleverer practitioner in the art of philandering than any he had as yet encountered.

"I am going to carry you off to the Gayety Theatre, Cissy, as soon as dinner is over. You won't mind, will you?"

"No; I shall be only too glad. I find my own rooms so dreadfully lonely in the

evening. It is a great change, you know, from my old life. I suppose it is very stupid of me, but I have been so used to seeing lots of people that I can't help feeling it. I don't get on well by myself, Lizzie. Shocking, isn't it, Mr. Paynter, that a woman should have to acknowledge herself so destitute of resources?"

"Well, of course, it must come hard upon you at first, Mrs. Hemsworth," returned her host; "you will soon get used to it."

"Not she, you dear, stupid old John," thought Mrs. Paynter. "Don't seem to try, either."

"I am afraid not," rejoined Cissy, quietly. "I have had people to amuse me all my life. I make a very bad hand of amusing myself."

"Don't think so badly of London as all that, Mrs. Hemsworth" (he had got the name now), interposed the guardsman, laughing. "There are plenty of us will only be too happy to try our utmost in that respect. Only wait till you know us, and you will have no cause to complain."

Cissy smiled, and a very sweet smile it was. She was one of those women who do great execution in silence.

"Really, Captain Detfield, I must protest," cried Mrs. Paynter, laughing. "I know the chivalry of your nature invariably prompts you to succor the afflicted; but, sir, your sole mission has been to amuse me, of late," and, continued Lizzie, with a little *moue*, "I can hardly give you a character for being successful."

"I suppose not; anxiety to succeed always mars our most strenuous efforts. The more we try, the more we don't do it. Whenever we are very keen to win, we always lose;—moral, *nil admirari;*—but then, Mrs. Paynter, you should not make such a point of always upsetting it."

"Very pretty; how often, pray, have you said that to us before? But it's time to start. You will come with us, John?"

"Yes, of course," returned Mr. Paynter, recognizing and responding to the matrimonial signal; "I'll ring for the carriage at once."

"Ah! that's good of you. We really, Cissy, could hardly trust Captain Detfield to entertain the two of us between the acts."

"I am sure Captain Detfield would take excellent care of us," replied Mrs. Hemsworth, "but I don't think we could do without Mr. Paynter, also. You will be sure to enjoy it."

Very considerable misgivings on that point had good-humored John Paynter, but he was loyal as an Arab to the laws of bread and salt, and little likely to let Cissy Hemsworth want a cavalier, even had he not received his wife's hint.

Half an hour more, and they were all at the Gayety, listening to the pretty music, and laughing at the fun of the Princess of Trebizonde.

Mrs. Paynter was carrying on an apparently deeply interesting conversation with Captain Detfield; Cissy gazing, with a smile on her face, at the business of the stage, while John Paynter, at the back of the box, was alternately pinching himself to keep

awake, and stifling a most inordinate craving for tobacco, when the door of the box quietly opened, and Montague Gore, stepping in, greeted his hostess that should have been, and apologized for not having joined her party sooner, on the grounds that he did not receive her note till too late to allow of his doing so.

Mrs. Paynter received his excuses graciously, and then said, "Cissy, let me introduce you to Mr. Gore."

"Mr. Gore and I are old friends, if he will allow me to call him so," replied Cissy, as she extended her hand. "If it had not been for his unwearied kindness a short time back, I don't know what would have become of me."

"Good gracious! Mrs. Hemsworth!" exclaimed the barrister. "I little dreamt of meeting you to-night."

"Here, take my place, Gore," murmured John Paynter. "It's just charity, for I'm froze for a cigar;" and, vacating his seat, he slipped out of the box.

"And he was your barrister, was he, Cissy?" thought Mrs. Paynter, smiling. "Ah! my dear, it's a great relief to me to have come to the 'him' at last. Now, unless you have that mysterious other that I have always dimly suspected in the far background, you two would suit admirably. You should reward the knight that rescued beauty in her difficulties with your fair, but penniless hand. Those dragons of the early ages, I suspect, were only metaphorical representations of the relentless creditors of the nineteenth century."

"Tell me, Captain Detfield, don't you think the ogre of our childhood typical of the money-lender, the hydra of the ancients, their mythical idea of compound interest? I have heard it said you should be a judge of such things."

Charlie started; there was a bitterness in his companion's tones, such as he had never heard before. Again, although his pecuniary difficulties were no secret among his intimates, yet he was immensely surprised to hear them thus hinted at by Mrs. Paynter. There are troubles men do not confide to the women they love, unless they are their wives. Money troubles are of this nature.

"I don't know," he said, after a slight pause, "who has been good enough to tell you that I am to some extent involved. If it was a man, he's a fool, and a mischievous one; but I won't pretend to *you* that it is not the case. Yes, Mrs. Paynter, compound interest is very like consumption: a complaint that a man don't often get the better of."

"Poor Charlie; I'm so sorry to hear that it is true," murmured the lady, softly.

"It's well worth being in the toils to hear you say so," he rejoined, in a low whisper.

"Hush! I want to hear this," replied Lizzie; and, having flashed a quick, responsive glance up into his face, she turned towards the stage.

"And so you are in London, Mrs. Hemsworth; for how long?" inquired Gore.

"I don't know," returned Cissy. "I never did know, you remember, anything about my own affairs. But I am settled in Hanover street for some little time now, where," she continued, looking gravely up at him, "if you will come and see me, I will try to thank you properly for all you have done for me. A very modest estab-

lishment indeed. You understand, none better, that I can afford no other now, — only lodgings. It is a change after being used to a big house of one's own," she concluded, plaintively.

"You know, Mrs. Hemsworth, nobody could be more sincerely sorry for you than myself."

"I know," replied Cissy, "that no one took half the pains to assist me that you did. There were many old friends who professed much sorrow for the tribulation I was in, but the only person who came to my succor was a comparative stranger, — yourself. I am never likely to forget that."

"You give me more credit than I deserve," replied Gore, quietly. "I happened to be a man of business. Your friends probably were not."

"Oh, yes, plenty of them were. I think, you know," she continued, slowly, "that they thought I was not worth helping, — that I should never entertain them again. What did it matter what became of me? I know I am not clever; but I fancy society don't care about you when you are in trouble."

"We won't discuss that, Mrs. Hemsworth; but I did want to know where you were."

Cissy raised her eyes and looked at him.

"Yes," he continued, rapidly, "I have got a clue; it is a mere thread as yet, and I don't know what may come of it. I have an idea; a wild idea, perhaps I had better call it, — but still an idea that there is some property belonging to you in this country. I can't say how much. I can't guess as yet how much, — big or little, I can't say, — but still something. I shall work it out though, if you will give me authority to do so. It was that I wanted from you. You can trust me, can you not?"

Cissy extended her hand; and, as he clasped it, replied: —

"Thoroughly. Come and see me, and you shall have full credentials."

"It's just over," exclaimed Mrs. Paynter. "Let us get away before the crush comes. Would you go and look for the carriage, Captain Detfield, please? And John, he's betaken himself to a cigar, I know."

But, at this moment, Mr. Paynter re-entered the box, and announced that he had already accomplished that errand.

"Then the sooner we depart the better," exclaimed Mrs. Paynter, as she took the guardsman's arm. "We will put you down, Cissy, on our way."

"Good-night, Mr. Gore, and don't forget your promise," said Cissy, once more extending her little hand, as she stepped into the brougham.

Montague Gore stood for a moment looking after the receding carriage, but his meditations were speedily interrupted by Charlie Detfield, who, having lit a cigar, suggested they should adjourn to the "Aluminium" for a quiet smoke.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAJOR'S BUSINESS.

MAJOR CLAXBY JENKENS had offices in John street, Adelphi, though what business it was that the major carried on in those two dingy, barely-furnished rooms, was still a mystery to those who had puzzled their brains concerning it. The major's business hours were not of long duration. He arrived every morning at twelve punctually, and left between three and four. His clients, though not numerous, were usually young, and well-dressed, and although, as may be supposed, principally of the male sex, were not so altogether. Trailing robes of silk and satin had swept those stairs ere this, in their anxiety to persuade the major to do his duty towards his neighbor.

Claxby Jenkens was a tolerably well-known man upon town, and yet nobody ever felt very sure that they knew anything about Claxby Jenkens. He was of somewhat doubtful status in society. He belonged to two or three tolerable clubs, but nobody could tell you anything about his early career. He called himself late of the Indian army; but it was curious that no old Indian officer ever could remember meeting him. Colonel Prawn, late of the Bombay Fusileers, whom the major had offended past forgiveness by selling him one evening at pool, declared: —

"By G—d, sir! the d—— fellow never was in the service at all!"

General Hamrice, whom the major had handled rather severely at *écarté*, stated as his opinion: —

"Jenkens — yes, sir — oh yes, he was in the service; but he's a long-headed fellow, Jenkens, — he found he wasn't getting on, so he left; and as the Horse Guards had neglected to promote him, Gad, sir! he didn't bother them, but just gazetted himself. Indian service, — no, no, that won't do. Why, Prawn there will tell you that he doesn't know the difference between a bungalow and Bangalore."

Still, when the major took a turn in the park of an afternoon (he was seldom seen there in the morning), there were plenty of men, well known in the fashionable world, who nodded to him, and occasionally a lady bowed. He was not a man that you would expect to find at balls, routs, the opera, etc., but he turned up at mixed dinner-parties sometimes. On these occasions he usually contented himself with a double gold-rimmed eyeglass, in lieu of spectacles, and seemed to be perfectly able to get along with that.

The major's clients rarely alluded to their connection with him. They made no pretence of knowing what his business was. If you had asked them, they would probably have answered you in this wise: —

"Oh, he's a doosid good fellow, you know, old Claxby Jenkens. What does he do?

Blessed if I know. Whether he deals in flax or fluids, I haven't an idea. I went to him upon quite another matter altogether."

The major usually described himself as a general dealer, who bought upon commission. What did he buy? Anything? Perhaps he might; still you never came across any one who had employed Claxby Jenkens very much in that way. True, here and there he had conducted a negotiation for the purchase of a house, a pair of carriage-horses, etc.; yet he hardly did sufficient in that way to warrant his regular attendance at his office. But it was whispered among the impecunious of the fashionable world that Major Jenkens was the man of all others who could put you in the way of raising money at short notice; not that he was a money-lender, — nothing of the sort. Young men who had gone to him with that idea had often descended those dirty stairs in John street quite overwhelmed with the major's virtuous indignation at their hinting such a thing. Neophytes these, who usually came back when they had learnt their lesson better. Claxby Jenkens didn't lend money; but if you were worth, or likely to be worth anything, he could and would introduce you to those who did.

The major, in short, was simply an agent to some of the leading money-lenders, and received a handsome bonus for every introduction he furnished. Living much in the world, and an astute man to boot, he knew pretty well those who were likely to prove profitable to his employers, — those who were not worth wasting powder and shot over. The bill-discounters placed immense confidence in him. It was seldom that he estimated a borrower at his wrong value. The secret was well kept, and of the many who passed through his hands, there were few suspected that he had any interest in, or made profit out of, their necessities. To those who came to him properly tutored, he was quite fatherly in his advice.

"My dear boy," he would say, "do without it if you can, — ask your own people for it, — anything. When you once pay over five per cent. for money, it's only a matter of time. You're bound to be broke."

But of course the major knew they couldn't do without it, and that they could not ask "their own people" for it, or they would not have been in John street; so, finally he furnished them with the address of one of his employers, and felt tranquilly that he had done his duty towards his neighbor and himself.

To older and more hardened offenders the major naturally took a different tone.

"Sorry to hear you want it," he would say, "but it's no use preaching. I should think you would find Simeon Levi, in Gray's inn, as reasonable as any one, and he'd most likely accommodate you; but his price is ruinous, of course. They all are. I found them so to my cost, years ago; and I don't suppose you will fare better than I did."

The major, too, had other ways of working out his nefarious livelihood. In spite of his gentlemanly exterior and courteous address, there was no more unscrupulous scoundrel in all London. And yet this man passed as a gentleman in society. Those

within his power naturally made no protest. The secret of his inner life was well kept, and though the Colonel Prawns and General Hamrices of this world might murmur against him, and speak dubiously of his military career, yet he held his own bravely. Little did those gentlemen think how very much even their estimate of Major Claxby Jenkens was above the reality.

It is always curious to reflect upon in club life how utterly ignorant we are of the real history of those with whom we associate. The man whom you chat with, dine with, smoke with, and who generally forestalls you in the rush for the evening papers, may be miserably impecunious, and living in an adjoining garret, or he may be revelling in a luxurious house and table, with forgery as a profession. We do have an explosion every now and then, which floods the journals; but there are a good many *surprises*, the story of which is only whispered with bated breath in those conventual establishments.

The major is sitting at his desk wrapped in a brown study. A pile of letters lies beside him, for his correspondence is usually both voluminous and varied. One is spread opened before him, and it is that, apparently, which has plunged him into such deep reverie.

"Dear Jenks," — it ran, — "have been away to St. Petersburg on a private errand the last four months — only got back here the night before last. The news is probably stale to you; but as you asked me always to let you know anything about the Hemsworths, at the risk of repetition I send it. I suppose you know M. H. died three months ago or more. I always told you he over-speculated. I was right; he did, and his widow is left penniless. What you may not know, is that she suddenly left Paris, and has gone nobody knows where. What do you think of Peruvians your side of the channel? and what, you old fox, would you discount the Prince Imperial's prospects at? He'll be worth backing before the Septennate is out. Thiers will hardly witness that, though some people vow it wont require to live very long to see the finish of it. Rouher will be the best man when the scramble comes, and that, of course, means the empire again. *Bien!* we financiers never made money as quick as under Louis Napoleon, so I say *Vive l'Empereur!* As for the Orleanists, they committed political suicide when they made up a quarrel of forty odd years standing with the elder branch. How Monsieur le Comte de Chambord could ever have been considered a political fact puzzles extremely,

"Yours sincerely,

"ADOLPHE RAYNER.

"Paris, October 5, 1874."

The major twisted and twirled this epistle between his restless fingers. It so happened the intelligence of Mark Hemsworth's death was news to him. It had never been copied into the English papers. Why should it? Mark Hemsworth, though an

Englishman by birth, had been long resident in Paris. If he had relatives in his own country, he had utterly ceased to hold any communication with them. He had been of the Bourse of Paris for many years, so thoroughly identified with the French Stock Exchange that his nationality would hardly occur to the journalists. At all events, his decease had occasioned no comment in the English papers. There had been no scandal connected with his death, — nothing to make it worth the notice of the correspondents of the "Times," Telegraph," "Standard," etc., to call attention to. No wonder the major, like Mrs. Paynter, had never heard of it; and yet Claxby Jenkens had an interest in knowing how it fared with Mark Hemsworth and his wife.

"Poor child!" he murmured, "I wonder where she is. I did it for the best, and yet she must want help now;" and this battered, hardened old marauder dropped his head upon his hands, and, if he did not actually weep, exhibited signs of genuine emotion, such as would have shaken the confidence of his employers sadly. Indulgence in emotion is quite incompatible with the profession of money-lending.

"She must be found," he muttered, at length. "I will write to Rayner. If she is still in Paris, and she may be, he won't be long before he knows where. The police there keep a more stringent eye on people's movements than we do, and Madame Hemsworth was too well known to disappear easily. If she has left — well, even then they may have a clue as to where she left for. Penniless? I am not so sure of that. I think not, if I could but find her. There's another man, too, I shall have to hunt up about this business; but he ought not to be difficult to put my hand on. Well, now for the rest of them," he continued, turning towards his letters once more. "Hum! 'Will call in at twelve. Yours truyl, Charlie Detfield.' But Detfield must know that he has got to the end of his tether, and that the money-lenders will have no more of him. Of course he seeks to prolong the agony — they all do, just as a man who can't swim struggles when drowning is inevitable. What's this?"

"DEAR JENKENS: — I've a young lady to dispose of, good looking, and with a tidy bit of money, say thirty thousand pounds or so. She has just made her courtesy to society. Her lamented father made his fortune in cheese, and she is living with two maiden aunts at Islington. As her guardian, I think the sooner she is married the better. With a little coaching, she would be quite presentable at the West in no time, for she's a quick, clever girl. If you've an impoverished swell on hand, we might make up an eligible match. She finds the money; he position. Drop me a line.

"Yours,

"JAMES ROXBY.

"16 Fenchurch street."

"Now," mused the major, "if ever two letters fitted in beautifully, it's these. If Charlie Detfield, when he comes here, is not prepared to take up the bills he has out,

instead of wishing to do others, I shall put this strenuously before him. Why, it's the very thing for him, and in his own interest as well as mine; I shall give Simmonds a hint to put on the screw if he pleases. It'd put him straight, put her into society and put something very comfortable into Roxby's pocket, and mine, no doubt. Under such circumstances, we can't have any nonsense about feelings, etc., and if he has any other attachment, unless it's a very satisfactory one, well, he must just swallow it at once, and have done with it. He's too deeply dipped to indulge in sentiment. Matrimony with him must mean money, and the latter he must come by pretty quickly. His prospects of marriage won't improve by having to leave the Guards."

Suddenly his clerk glided into the room with "Gentlemen to see you, sir," and placed in his hand the card of the subject of his meditations.

"Show him in," replied the major, throwing himself back in his chair, and beginning rapidly to run over in his mind the arguments he intended urging.

"How are you, Jenkens?" said the guardsman, as he entered the room, with a nonchalance sadly suggestive of its being neither his first visit, nor the doing of his first bill.

"Good-morning, Captain Detfield; charmed to see you. You've come, I suppose, about those horses of Packenham's; there's one would suit you well, perfect hack, and can jump a bit besides."

The major kept up the fiction of being a general commission agent, with wonderful pertinacity, and unless you humored him in this particular you were little likely to get anything else out of him.

But Detfield understood this thoroughly, and replied as if the acquirement of that identical hack was the sole thing wanting to complete his happiness.

"Just what I wanted to talk to you about; only two questions. Is it sound in its wind? Would he look at a hundred guineas?"

"Sound as a bell, I believe; but I think he'd want a trifle more than that."

"I was afraid so; it's beyond my figure, then, for the times are hard, and, in my profession, we can't indulge in the luxury of strikes, although the pay of the British officer has remained stationary for hard on to a century, and the agricultural laborers' grievances are nothing to ours."

"Never mind—it is sufficient that I know you want a hack; there are plenty more horses than Packenham's. I undertake to find you a hack before the month is out, that shall suit in every respect; including price."

"Thanks; and now by the way, Jenkens, do you think Simmonds would be good for another three hundred? I must have it, and it's better not to break fresh ground if one can help it."

The major put on his spectacles with great deliberation, and then commenced stabbing his desk slowly with a small penknife.

"Excuse me, Captain Detfield," he said at length, "but what do you suppose will be the end of this?"

The young man's face flushed, and he drew his breath hard before he replied: —

"What's to be the end of it, major? Well, unless I've a turn at Newmarket, I suppose a pretty general smash will be the end of it. I shall have to realize the commission, and leave the dear old corps."

"Well, why don't you pull up?" inquired the major, as innocently as if in ignorance of the "why."

"Pooh! you know all about it. I'm going down hill with no skid on, and there's no stopping the coach then till you get to the bottom."

"But if a way was pointed out to you of escaping all this," observed the major, impaling a small wafer-box with his penknife.

"I'd say I'd come across a conjuror," interposed Charlie Detfield, quickly.

"Well, I don't claim to be that," replied the major, smiling. "But did it never occur to you to mend your fortunes by matrimony? Why don't you marry?"

"What, a pot of money?" said Charlie, after a short pause. "No, I don't think that would do," he continued slowly, as his thoughts reverted to the object of his present infatuation.

"Why shouldn't it? A man in your position has lots of opportunities."

"You mistake there. If you mean that I know plenty of girls with money, you are right; but if you think the authorities would allow them to marry a penniless devil like myself, you're pretty considerably out. I can't say I ever thought about it. It never occurred to me to get out of the wood in that way; but I do know that it's none so easy, even if I cared to try."

"But," retorted the major, "supposing I could introduce you to a nice girl, with a very pretty fortune; would you try then?"

"Hum! I can't say," answered Charlie, slowly. "I don't quite like the idea. It's rather mean, marrying a girl for her money."

"It's done every day, and you would give something on your side to balance it, — position."

"She's easily contented, if she thinks being wife to a subaltern in the Guards position," laughed Charlie.

"But it would be to her," exclaimed the major, quickly. "Your connections are good; your people of good status in society."

"Rather sounds as if she and her belongings were very much the reverse," observed Detfield, dryly.

"Just so; you don't expect to get everything for nothing. If her people made their money in trade, what has that to do with it? Everybody is going in for trade nowadays, or business, as they prefer to term it. Same thing, only it sounds better in conversation. What do you say to it?"

"I don't know. Of course, I couldn't say anything till I had seen the young lady, at all events. But on the whole, I think I'd rather not have anything to do with it."

The major said nothing, but continued lazily to stab his desk with his penknife, though ever and anon he shot a keen glance at Detfield from under his spectacles.

"Well, do you think I had better try Simmonds again, or not?" inquired Charlie, after a pause of some seconds.

"Certainly, try him; but unless you can point to some forthcoming improvement in your prospects, I think he's likely to turn rusty—"

"And unaccommodating, eh? Well, it will be a bore that, because I must have the money somehow."

"Why not think over what I've been saying to you?"

"Because I don't fancy it a bit. No; if I'm to go a mucker, as I suppose I am, I'll not get out of it that way," said Charlie, rising. "Good-by;" and having shook hands with the major, Detfield took his departure.

Claxby Jenkens stabbed his desk somewhat viciously, as the door closed on his visitor.

"Young idiot!" he muttered. "Salvation is offered him, and he literally turns up his nose at it. I suppose there's a woman in the case. I must find out who she is for one thing, and recommend Simmonds to be tolerably hard on him, for another. When he finds the screw put on, he'll be more amenable to reason. The idea of the young fool not actually jumping at such a chance as I placed before him! Well, I suppose at five-and-twenty we haven't as yet learned what is best for us. But I'm going to be a good friend to you, Charlie Detfield, whether you will or no, and for the best of all possible reasons, that my interest requires me to be so."

CHAPTER VII.

HE MUST MARRY MONEY.

"I REALLY can't make up my mind about her," mused Mrs. Paynter, as she sat dawdling over her tea and toast, a few days after her visit to the Gayety Theatre. "John says she's charming, and took the earliest opportunity of going off for a cigar; but then John always does that. It was odd that Montague Gore should turn out to be the man who came to her assistance in Paris. Well, that's a great point in her favor. She's intimate with him to start with. I thought it might do before; I am sure it would now. And how beautifully she carried it off last night! How innocently she asked him to come and see her! Upon my word, I don't know at this minute whether she's the deepest woman I ever met, or next door to a fool. She speaks with a confidence about her future that can only be the result of intense reliance

on her own capabilities, or utter ignorance of the world. Surely she's lived too much in it to be the latter. Yet there are few women, who, brought up in luxury, on finding themselves thrown pretty well friendless upon their own resources — for what is a thousand pounds? — who wouldn't blench at the prospect. And yet she does not. Poor Charlie, too; if all I hear's true, his circumstances are getting desperate. I don't quite care about him to the extent he thinks, but I'm fond of him in my way, and am very sorry to discover that he's in the hands of the Philistines. Oh, dear! I don't know how it is, but it's one's pleasantest acquaintance that come to grief always. Bah!" she exclaimed, with a little grimace, "there are a good many people I know, who I'd insure from trouble on those very grounds."

At that instant a servant entered the room, and, presenting a visiting card on a salver, said: —

"The gentleman begs to know if you can see him, madam, for a few minutes."

"'Major Claxby Jenkens.' I never heard of him in my life. Never mind; show him up, William."

The major was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet when he had once decided upon anything. He had determined that Charlie Detfield should marry this Islington heiress, and at once set to work to see how it was to be brought about. It was not difficult for a man like the major to find out, in the course of a couple of days, a good deal about Detfield's life and habits. He was not long before he heard that Charlie was at present *épris* with that pretty Mrs. Paynter, over whom society was habituated to sigh and shake its head a good deal. The major knew Mrs. Paynter perfectly by sight, though he had never taken any very great notice of her so far; but the major knew a wonderful lot of people in this fashion, and could have written slight biographical sketches of many of them besides.

It does not follow that he had any wish to make their acquaintance; still he did quite consider it part of his business to know everybody about town by sight, and to know as much more about them as he could manage to pick up. He thought he could form a pretty correct estimate of Mrs. Paynter, and he conceived the bold design of enlisting her as an ally in his scheme. At all events, he resolved to call upon her; how far he should take her into his confidence, circumstances must decide.

Lizzie gazed a little curiously at her visitor, as she motioned him to a seat, — a neatly-dressed, gentlemanly-looking man, hair somewhat shot with gray, and wearing gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Mrs. Paynter will, I trust, excuse the liberty I have taken, but I have come to solicit her influence in a scheme that I have strongly at heart."

The major paused to give Lizzie an opportunity of reply.

"Let her say anything," he thought; "it will pave the way, at all events, and give me some notion if I am right in my ideas about her."

But Mrs. Paynter only bowed her head slightly, in a manner which distinctly indicated that he should proceed.

"I am given to understand that Captain Detfield is a friend of yours," observed the major, at length. "May I go so far as to say, an intimate friend of yours?"

Though much astonished, Lizzie had lived too much in the world not to be able to repress any sign of such astonishment. She replied, quietly:—

"Yes, I know Captain Detfield very well; intimately, if you like."

"May I ask if you are aware that his affairs are extremely involved?"

"I have heard something of the kind, but you can scarcely suppose Captain Detfield would make me his confidante in matters of that sort," retorted Lizzie, a little sharply.

"No, perhaps not. I am also told that you have considerable influence with Captain Detfield."

"Whoever your informant may be, sir, it strikes me that he has been taking most unwarrantable liberties with my name," exclaimed Lizzie, indignantly. "I know Captain Detfield, as I know many other people in society, very well. But I have nothing to do with Captain Detfield's affairs, and I am sure he would be the first person to tell you so."

"Captain Detfield is very foolish as regards his own interests, and will not listen to the advice of his friends," said the major, slowly.

"Really, I can see no use in this discussion. I have nothing to say to Captain Detfield's private affairs. I have neither right nor inclination to interfere in them," replied Lizzie, settling herself with considerable demonstration in her chair.

The major quietly took the hint and rose; he had not expected that it would be all easy sailing at this first interview.

"I can only apologize for this intrusion," he said. "You speak, Mrs. Paynter, as the friends of a man in difficulties generally do speak. They are always very punctilious about their right to interfere."

The blood rushed into Lizzie's face at the taunt, and her eyes sparkled. Coquette she might be, she was not the woman to turn away from a friend in need.

"Stop, sir! Are you aware that I am neither relation nor connection of Captain Detfield?"

"Perfectly," returned the major.

"And you! May I ask if you are a friend of his?"

"The most practical one he happens to have just now, though perhaps he would not admit it."

"And what on earth is it you suppose that I could do to assist him?"

"You could give what he needs much just now,—good advice," replied the major, as he resumed his seat. "He might listen to you, although he won't to me."

"This is getting interesting," thought Lizzie. "I don't think I ever set up in this line before. Giving good advice to an admirer is quite a new sensation."

"And what, pray, may I ask is it that you want me to recommend to him?"

"To marry," returned the major, tersely.

"Good gracious, whom?" exclaimed Mrs. Paynter, fairly surprised out of her usual *sang-froid*. "Who is she? Whom do you want him to marry?"

"That, madam, I shall have the honor to explain to you a little later, if you will allow me. At present, I only wish you to, if possible, persuade Captain Detfield that the only way out of his present difficulties, the only way to avert the ruin that so speedily threatens him, is to marry *money*. It will be my business to find him a bride."

"I won't move a step in the business till I know who she is. I won't say a word on the subject till I have seen the lady," retorted Mrs. Paynter, quickly. "I never thought of it before, but I dare say I could find a wife for him easily enough."

"If Mrs. Paynter will undertake the mission of finding a wife for Captain Detfield with thirty thousand pounds, then I need trouble myself no further," said the major, rising.

"No, I don't know, I don't altogether say that. I won't promise to do anything."

"But you will think over what I have said, Mrs. Paynter. Remember, I only wish to pull Detfield through his difficulties, and I see nothing for him but to marry *money*, and that right soon. If you can manage this for him, well and good. If not, would it be too much to ask you to let me know? You have my card and address."

"I will think over it, and you shall hear from me when I've made up my mind," replied Lizzie.

"I have the honor, then, to wish you good-morning, and success in your charitable endeavors," replied the latter, as, with a low reverence, he left the room.

"Well," said Mrs. Paynter, throwing herself back in a chair, "this really is quite a new experience. The idea of looking out a wife for one of one's own peculiar properties. If anybody but that cool, clever, audacious gentleman, who has just left, had proposed such a thing to me, I don't think he would have forgot it in a hurry. I wonder how he came to know about my intimacy with Charlie. Not that there's anything I need fret about in that, but he evidently does know Charlie is a favored adorer. Now, as he is not in the least in my set, how did he come by that knowledge? I feel just a little afraid of a man who possesses so much information about one. Who is he,—this Major Claxby Jenkens? I must ask Charlie that, and I wonder what he will say when I do."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE VERGE.

MONTAGUE GORE has paid more than one visit to Hanover street since he encountered Cissy Hemsworth at the "Gayety." A cool, shrewd barrister, and generally immersed in business, he is little given to sentiment, and yet be begins to find a strange fascination in Cissy's society. She is always unfeignedly glad to see him. She makes no secret, that in spite of Mrs. Paynter's kindness,—and she admits that it

is impossible to be kinder than Lizzie is to her, — she finds London a little *triste*. Much occupied as his time is, he contrives to spare some of it to the following up of a suspicion that occurred to him in Paris. He believes that Cissy Hemsworth had a settlement at the time of her marriage, although he has found no trace of such a deed. Still, among the dead man's papers he had come across a mysterious memorandum, that if he had read it aright seemed to hint at such a thing. In a sort of pocket diary, in which Mark Hemsworth had apparently been accustomed to roughly jot down his day's business doings, he had found the following entry: —

"January 28th. — Received per bill on Coutts, £576, half-yearly payment on C.'s settlement."

Very vague, indeed, this. C.'s settlement might, of course, mean anything, but coupled with the term half-yearly payment, Gore had jumped to the conclusion that it did refer to a settlement made on Mrs. Hemsworth at her marriage. Still, if so, where was the property? Who were her trustees? He could not find a trace of either. Carefully and patiently as he had unravelled the tangled skein of Mark Hemsworth's affairs, he could discover not another word that could possibly refer to this property. And yet it must be worth close upon twelve hundred a year, if it existed.

Had Mark Hemsworth made away with it? — the trustees consenting rather from ignorance, or in collusion with him. That was possible, quite possible; but still not to be taken for granted till the said trustees had been discovered. Of course, it was but too likely that Hemsworth, so terribly involved as his death showed him to have been, should have laid hands upon the money if he could. But except through fraud, or very great negligence on the part of the trustees, a marriage settlement holds its own pretty tightly. Gore was pushing his inquiries in every direction, but so far had met with no success.

Of course he had gone to Coutts' in the first instance. Little difficulty there in tracing the bill, but unfortunately that told nothing. The bill had been drawn by a sporting stockbroker, but for £500, had been presented by a gentleman, who, paying in the balance of £76 in cash, had asked the favor of another for £576 to transmit to Hemsworth et Cie., Paris. The stockbroker was a regular customer of theirs; but about the gentleman that changed the bill they knew nothing. The stockbroker, upon being interrogated, refused to give any information in the first instance; but, at last admitted that he paid it away to a well-known turfite in settlement of his losses over the Croydon steeple-chase. There all traces vanished, when the aforesaid speculator was appealed to; he could recollect nothing. He was always paying and receiving money. Yes; he betted pretty largely, and a betting-book didn't last him long. No, he didn't keep his old betting-books, unless he had some special reason for doing so. He hadn't got that one now. He remembered he won some money from Mr. Jay, the stockbroker, at Croydon, but he couldn't say how much. He thought he was paid by a check. Well, yes; it might have been on Coutts. What did he do with it? Paid it away, and he'd be considerably dashed if he could recollect to whom.

Somewhat discouraging, this; but Montague Gore knew as well as any one the patience and perseverance imperative to the solving of a problem of this nature, — how, when the clue seems within your hands, it often leads to nothing. A man of tough material, of dogged, invincible resolution, who had made himself, who had started in his profession with small means, but great energy and capacity of work; clever, certainly, but who owed his success more to toil than genius; possessed specially of the faculty of always finding time to do what he wanted, — a faculty which is the result principally of method and determination.

He was a man who mixed but sparingly in society. A terrible catastrophe, in early life, had steeled his heart against the love of woman. Over the writing-table in his chambers hung the picture of a fair girl whom Montague Gore, some dozen years ago, had thought to make his bride. A light muslin dress and a treacherous fire had shivered that dream. A few hours' agony, and the original of that picture had yielded her soul to her Maker, and left her betrothed with the life crushed out of him to continue his struggle for fame and fortune alone. Gore stifled his sorrow by hard work; as the years rolled by, the first fierce anguish mellowed down naturally to tranquil resignation; but no woman had seemed fair to Montague Gore since that terrible day when a telegram had summoned him only just in time to receive his love's last sigh. The hapless victim of this tragedy had been Fox Brine's sister.

Now, once again, he was beginning to feel the fascinations of a woman. He could not deny to himself that Cissy Hemsworth's society had unwonted attraction in it. He had not at all made up his mind what was to come of it. He was of an age now when men take a wife with due consideration, or are, at all events, supposed to do so. Charming as he thought Cissy, yet he was not blind to one thing, — that was her extravagance. He knew, of course, perfectly, that she had but a few hundreds left, and yet Cissy lived as if she had no care for the future. Her cool indifference to that future staggered him. He had once hinted that the apartments she occupied were expensive, more than her means justified.

"Ah, yes," replied Cissy, "living is terribly expensive in London. My poor rooms do cost more than I can afford; but what would you have? I must live somewhere. I don't think I could get anything decent for less than I pay here, and the people are very civil. I do not understand the economies."

And she, — how did she regard him? — he wondered. She made no disguise of how pleased she was to see him. She was frankness itself on that point, but then it was qualified by the admission that she had so few friends, and felt so utterly lost in this big London.

"Then, you know," she would say, with the sweetest smile, "you are my advocate, and it is such a comfort to have some one to talk over my miserable prospects with."

And yet she was as radiant over these "miserable prospects," as if her chance of being absolutely penniless in little more than a twelvemonth was a fact that had no existence.

To understand Cissy Hemsworth it is necessary to look back upon her former life. It had been instilled into her, from a child, that she must look upon a good marriage as her provision in life. At sixteen she was introduced to Mark Hemsworth as her future husband. She had been for the half-dozen preceding years educated in a convent in France, so that there was nothing repugnant to her in the idea. Her schoolfellows were all brought up with similar notions. When her father announced to Cissy that her marriage was arranged, she accepted it as a matter of course. She felt nothing more than a little natural curiosity to see her *fiancé*. If she was not violently struck with his appearance, she certainly felt no distaste for the marriage. She supposed all girls were married in this wise. She had never heard it said that marriages were made in heaven, or of love and esteem being supposed to enter into their composition.

So she was wedded, and found herself at the head of a fine house in Paris. She had nothing to say to it; her husband managed everything. From the day he took her, a child-wife, from the altar, to the day of his death, he had treated her as a child. He alternately petted or scolded her, just as his capricious temper might dictate; treating her at times, indeed, almost brutally, when the battle on the Bourse had gone hard with him. But she had carriages, servants, and every description of luxury at her command. On one point Mark Hemsworth was consistent; however ill it might fare with him in the financial fray, he never stayed his lavish expenditure. Cissy had never heard the word economy even whispered. Her husband was always very authoritative concerning her dress. She might spend what she pleased, apparently, but it was high misdemeanor that he should see the same robe too often, or find that his wife's was not one of the notable toilettes at a fashionable assembly. So far as this last went, Mark Hemsworth had little reason to complain. Nature had endowed Cissy with great taste, and a superb figure. When to such gifts is added *carte blanche* at a Parisian modiste's, a woman is not likely to be worsted by her compeers. Madame Hemsworth had established a reputation in this respect, and was wont to see her toilet quoted in the journals. Our own papers after Ascot and Goodwood generally rave more or less of millinery, and no wonder.

One can easily imagine, with such training as this, that Cissy Hemsworth had no more conception of how to commence living economically than a child. She thought she was economizing. She was living in lodgings instead of a house of her own. She had no servants but her own maid. She had no carriage, and, as she said, never sent for a brougham except it was an absolute necessity. Cissy really did not see how her expenses were to be much further curtailed. Dress, — well she had spent nothing on that, she insisted. The elaborate mourning outfit she had ordered in Paris had so far been sufficient. She was gratified by discovering that her mode was, at all events, scarcely to be met with in London, as yet; but, as she said to Mrs. Paynter, "It will be terrible next spring, when I go into half mourning, — I shall want such a lot of things."

Cissy had borne neither love nor esteem for her husband. He had never sought to inspire the first, and, far from taking pains to gain the latter, had alienated it by harsh, coarse, capricious, brutal treatment. Mark Hemsworth was by no means a faithful consort, and had taken little trouble to hide his infidelities from his wife. Cissy had regarded him with some aversion and some awe. Still, though she feared him, she had upon occasion shown a spirit which had, at all events, compelled Mark Hemsworth to acknowledge that there was a limit to what insult his wife would submit to.

It is easy to conceive what such training had made of Cissy Hemsworth. She had grown up a woman accustomed to adulation, to unlimited luxury, to unstinted means. Now she was called upon to confront the world, and to get her living as best she could. Such was the view of her position as it would naturally appear to any one conversant of the circumstances. The only person it did not seem to strike was Cissy herself. True, it might be said in her favor that she had conducted herself very well under considerable provocation; that, with great temptation, no one could breathe an aspersion on her fair fame; that, as a neglected and ill-used wife, she had been ever loyal to her husband. Yet this was hardly the woman a prudent man would select for his bride; and still a shrewd, hard-headed man of the world, like Montague Gore, was, at this moment, debating this question with himself.

He saw it all, too, so clearly. He knew she was unfitted for his wife. He could not even flatter himself that he had gained her love. He was too quick not to understand that her very frankness with him was an unfavorable sign. He knew well that when a woman's heart is touched there is a certain reticence, a slight embarrassment of manner, at times even an inclination to be almost brusque and rude to the man she favors, but has not yet admitted her passion for. He felt that if she did marry him it would be because she was in want of a home, a protector; and still, in spite of all this, Montague Gore continued to visit her constantly, ever turning over in his mind whether he should ask her to be his.

An infatuation, no doubt; but when men verging on the forties fall in love they usually do so with much earnestness of purpose. Montague Gore had never thought to love again. We do make such mistakes, and feel somewhat puzzled when the celibacy we have mapped out for ourselves seems liable to depend once more upon a woman's yes or no.

Montague Gore, as he walks down to Hanover street, is still revolving in his mind this question that has so much disturbed him the last two or three weeks. Cissy's face has got mixed up with his business in strange fashion of late. Her lustrous eyes and dusky tresses seem to flit across his briefs in a way most unfavorable to a clear comprehension of their contents. He feels it imperative to see her on business, although it would scarcely occur to him that it was necessary to see any other client under the same circumstances. He has nothing to impart; but it has suddenly occurred to him that it would be advisable to learn something of Cissy's childhood if possible. So he strides along, through the thick November fog, until he arrives in Hanover street.

"Yes, Mrs. Hemsworth is at home, and will see him."

Gore ascends to the pretty sitting-room that he knows so well, and is greeted with great cordiality.

"So very kind of you to come and see me such wretched weather," observed Cissy, as she seated herself comfortably in an arm-chair. "I shall never have courage to go out such a miserable day. You know you are always welcome, but with your usual tact you have timed your visit so as to ensure both thanks and gratitude to boot. Now you shall tell me your news; you've none, I fear, favorable to my own immediate interests."

"Nothing, I regret to say," replied the barrister. "Do you know, I've come down to ask questions?"

"What about?" returned Cissy, laughing; "but remember, Mr. Gore, it must be question for question. I can't guess what you want to know, but I also have pangs of curiosity at times."

"Well, I think, Mrs. Hemsworth, — it struck me in short, the other night, that it might facilitate the inquiry I am making upon your behalf, if you would not mind telling me as much as you can remember of your early life. Your life, I mean, previous to your entering that convent."

Cissy's face fell, and for some seconds she made no reply. At last she said, slowly: —

"I hope it will not stand in the way of such prospects as I may have; but, Mr. Gore, I do not think I can tell you that."

The barrister started; he had no anticipation of such an answer. It was not that he expected to gain much from hearing the history of Mrs. Hemsworth's childhood, but still it might afford a hint of some new direction in which to prosecute his search. What objection could she have to reveal it? The first eleven or twelve years of her life, surely there could be nothing to conceal about.

"I don't say that it will; but you will also, very probably, decline to tell me anything about your parents, — that may hamper me considerably," he observed at length.

"I have no recollection at all of my mother. She died when I was quite a child," replied Cissy.

"But your father; surely I understood you that it was he who arranged your marriage, and gave you away," exclaimed Gore, in much bewilderment.

"Yes," rejoined Cissy, quietly.

"And of him?"

"I will tell you nothing," interrupted the widow. "I cannot; I don't wish to make any mysteries of my early years. I am sure I cannot see anything to make a mystery about; but I have promised to keep my lips sealed concerning them, and I intend to keep my word."

Montague Gore felt uneasy, disconcerted. What reason could Cissy's father have

for keeping so entirely in the background. He was already aware that he should commit a great imprudence if he married Mrs. Hemsworth. What she now told him was certainly not calculated to remove his misgivings; and yet so completely was he fascinated with her, that it was odds, had Cissy given him any encouragement, that he would have asked her to be his bride in the course of this interview. But she did not. She was simply frank and cordial; and, after some further desultory conversation, Gore took his departure, the momentous words still unspoken.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE TEMPLE.

Mr. Fox Brine pursued his arduous literary career in very comfortable chambers in the Temple. It was there he sketched out these thrilling romances, sparkling comedies, tremendous dramas and smashing articles which never received embodiment. The nether regions are reputed paved with good intentions; Mr. Brine's chambers were carpeted with undeveloped ideas. The very walls and book-shelves bore witness to the multiplicity of his conceptions. Here hung a chart of the Mull of Cantire, which he had procured with some difficulty when he had thought of that great drama on the Irish Rebellion. At the time that he was overwhelming his friends with that idea, it had been mildly suggested to him that the French did not disembark in that vicinity. To which Mr. Brine had loftily replied that art could not be trammelled by history, and that, if Hoche did not know where he should have landed in a dramatic point of view, he (Fox Brine) did, and intended to correct such mistake. There hung an ordnance map of the county of Devonshire. Mr. Brine had once conceived an elaborate notion of a novel connected with that county, and commenced collecting materials accordingly. With similar view of writing articles on the French dramatists, he had got together a pretty extensive library of their works. Biographical dictionaries, dictionaries of dates, classical dictionaries, dictionaries of all kinds were strewn about the room; for with so undetermined a bent of genius, Mr. Brine argued he never could be certain what books of reference he might require.

The nattiest of writing-tables stood in one of the windows, furnished with material of every description; foolscap, journalist slips, note-books, cahiers, pens, and pencils of all sorts; for Mr. Brine was quite as much impressed at this minute, as he had been on leaving the University, that he was just about to begin. He still sprang from his bed, lit a candle, and rushing to the writing-table, dashed off some crude idea for play or story as he was wont to do some seven years ago, with equal belief that it would develop into something that should make the town ring again. Continual

failure is apt to discourage a man; but Fox Brine had never encountered that, for the best of all possible reasons, — that he had never yet solicited the suffrages of the public. That his ideas always ended in dreams, never seemed to dispirit this philosopher in the least. He felt quite as confident of success, whenever he could find time, as ever. What stood in the way of his finding that precious necessity he did not condescend to explain, but his intimates were not sanguine of success ever attending his search for that requisite leisure.

Mr. Fox Brine, clad in smoking-jacket and slippers, and stretched at full length on his sofa, is tranquillizing his jaded mind with a cigarette and a French novel, when some one knocks sharply at his door.

"Come in," cries the literary theorist, raising his head slightly; and, obedient to the command, Charlie Detfield enters the apartment.

"Hard at work, Fox, as usual, I see," observed Charlie, grinning, and throwing his hat and gloves carelessly on the table.

It is a little joke amongst Brine's friends always to affect a belief that he is overwhelmed with work.

"Halloa, Charlie!" returned that gentleman, making a supreme effort, and thereby attaining a sitting position. "You find me '*paresseux comme un vrai artiste.*' What brings you to the East so early? It looks bad, young man, when Her Majesty's guardsmen are doing business in the city at these, for them, abnormal hours. There is a suspicion of looking after money in unwholesome localities about it."

"I don't know that I should quarrel much about the locality, Fox; if I could but discover a Tom Tiddler's ground, I'd not be very particular as to the where," replied Detfield, as he threw himself wearily back in a chair.

They were old college friends these two, and had been sworn allies ever since. Though running in very different grooves, yet both were essentially London men, and consequently they often met. The guardsman was always delighted if he could induce Brine to join his dinner on the Bank guard, and knew that his friend was equally pleased whenever he invaded his rooms in the Temple.

"Financial tightness, eh, Charlie?" replied Brine, lazily. "I tell you what it is, — it's all nonsense to talk of the unpleasantness, but really there's nothing like suffering the pomp of respectable poverty. Now I put it to you. It has happened to me in the month of August to have predilections in favor of dining at Richmond, or down the river, when the state of the exchequer has compelled me to devour a chop at the 'Cheshire Cheese' instead. I really doubt whether I did not suffer as much, mentally, as disreputable poverty which didn't dine at all."

"Yes, old fellow, but you had somewhat the pull of them physically, you know," rejoined Detfield, helping himself to a cigar from a box on the table.

"Physical suffering dulls mental," responded Fox, dogmatically.

"And, therefore, if you had only abstained from gratifying your unholy appetite— kept, in short, the fast which your circumstances demanded — you wouldn't have had

your mind harassed and perturbed by visions of Richmond park and the silvery Thames. But I want to talk to you, Fox."

"Well," replied Mr. Brine, languidly, "talk. If you're going to rave about feminine attractions, don't be offended if I doze. If you're in a scrape, with a woman at the bottom of it, don't ask my advice, because I know by experience a man always goes his own way under such circumstances; if it's a financial scrape, my sympathy and name are at your service. 'I give you all; I can no more.' As regards more substantial help, imagine me, as our transatlantic friends say, 'cornered.' I presume you can't have come to grief except through love or paper."

"Never mind my love affairs; they're not likely to hurt me."

"I have heard that you were carrying on with Mrs. Paynter more than our grandmothers would approve," observed Brine, meditatively.

"Don't be a fool, Fox," retorted Charlie, laughing. "Do you want to know the worst? I admire Mrs. Paynter, — I like her better than any other woman in London, and, just at present, she condescends to approve of me; but, old fellow, she's not likely to lose her head, supposing even that I did; no harm, believe me, will come of that flirtation."

"God bless me! how can you go on with it, then?" exclaimed Brine. "It must be so very insipid. Flirtation I always understood to be

> "'A chase of idle hopes and fears,
> Begun in folly, closed in tears.'

I never go in for it myself, and I'm glad now I don't. I always looked upon it like playing with fire; that there was all the excitement of a possible conflagration — "

"Do hold your tongue, Fox! I want to ask you a question. Do you know anything about Major Claxby Jenkens?"

"Well, I might say no further than that I do know him by sight; but I'm not quite clear, if I thought it all out, that I couldn't tell you something about him."

"Then think it all out, because he's becoming rather a prominent fact in my somewhat disordered affairs, just now, and I should like to know what I can about him. Is he a money-lender? in the first place; has he a daughter? in the second; and, thirdly, who the devil is Claxby Jenkens?"

"No, I don't quite think he's a money-lender, Charlie," replied Brine, as he threw his cigarette into the grate; "and as to who Claxby Jenkens is, I fancy none but Claxby Jenkens can inform you. As for daughters, he may have a dozen, for all I know. What do you want to know for?"

"Well," said Detfield, "if not of the tribes, he's in alliance with them. I happened to see him on business the other day, and he not only proposed matrimony as a cure for my liabilities, but offered to find the lady."

"The devil he did!" exclaimed Fox Brine, starting up with considerable animation. 'This becomes interesting. By Jove! there's a drama to be got out of this. Act the

First. — On the road to ruin. Act the Second. — Ruined, despair, suicidal thoughts. Act the Third. — Salvation, and marriage with Rebecca, daughter of Isaac. Think of the tableaux, my boy," he continued, enthusiastically. "Epsom Downs for the fall of the drop in Act I. Waterloo Bridge by moonlight, for Act II.; of course you're saved by the policeman; no, perhaps you had better go over the parapet, and be rescued by the jolly young waterman and Rebecca, who happens to be taking her pleasure on the river just then; water scene that would beat the 'Colleen Bawn' hollow. Act III., Tableau — A Jewish wedding, with Moorish ballet; quite permissible, if not quite correct. Art, sir, cannot be fettered by accuracy of detail. All right, Charlie, my boy; we'll get a drama out of it any way, and pay all our debts. I've got two or three veteran creditors we shall probably kill. They dun me whenever their livers are out of order and the gout threatens them. I'm a sort of open sore that carries off their noxious humors. When they've nobody to bully they'll probably cease to exist."

"Well, now, Fox, if you have done raving," observed Detfield, who could not help laughing at seeing his friend so fairly off on that visionary hobby, that he had never ceased riding since he had commenced keeping his terms for the bar; "I should like — "

"Raving, and you'd like — " interrupted Brine, with mock solemnity; "what would you like, sir? What more would you have? You come to me, a votary of art, with your petty, worldly grievances, and I reduce them, by the inspiration of my genius, to a dramatic poem, — a conception calculated to make not only you but all London weep at the story of your woes. Great heavens! when I propose to harrow the whole metropolis with the history of your wrongs, what more would you have, ingrate? I have done. Now, you soulless being, what's the row?"

"That which yourself has raised chiefly," replied Charlie. "I only want a quiet talk, and I should like — "

"To have it all to yourself," interrupted Brine. "No, I'll not submit to the monologue. Do you think I also have not ideas, and that it does not occur to me to express them?"

"No, by Jove, I don't, nor any one else that knows you! But still I should like — "

"Of course you would," again interposed Brine. "Why on earth can't you say what you would like at once, instead of beating about the bush in this manner?"

"Something to drink," replied Charlie, grinning. He knew Fox Brine thoroughly, and was not to be extinguished by his badinage.

"And why couldn't you say so before? There never is any bringing you military men to the point," rejoined Brine, with the utmost gravity.

"Well, I don't think if you put that point to my company, Fox, you'll have much cause of complaint. Meanwhile, give me some claret and soda, and I'll tell you some news for it."

"What's that?" inquired Brine, as he produced the required beverage.

"I think Montague Gore is in a fair way to get married."

"Montague Gore married! Pooh, my dear Charlie! What put that into your head? Don't you know the story of my poor sister?"

"Yes, I have heard the history of that tragedy of his early days," replied Detfield; "but you must remember that was a good while ago. He is pretty hard hit now, I fancy; and so think better judges than I."

"The better judges in this case being Mrs. Paynter," observed Brine, without ever glancing at his companion. "Well, it's a thing I'd sooner have a woman's opinion on than a man's, if you're quite sure that you have really got it. But ladies sometimes predict what they wish on this point. You see I've known Gore all my life, and, although he is a dozen years my senior, intimately. He was always kind to me when I was a little beggar. We came from the same neighborhood, and are in a way connected. Now, who's the lady?"

"A Mrs. Hemsworth, a widow; and further than that her late husband was in business of some kind at Paris. I can tell you nothing; stay, yes, I can: the widow is a deuced good-looking, attractive, lady-like woman."

"That's all you know, eh?" inquired Brine.

"All!" replied Detfield, tersely.

"Very good; now we'll discuss your own marriage."

"I say, hold on; what are you talking about?" cried Charlie, hurriedly.

"This little prescription that Doctor Jenkens has prescribed for you. He is a clever man that. I really don't see, my dear Charlie, if you're in the difficulties I deem, what you could do better. There's only one thing puzzles me,—what the deuce makes him take such a fatherly interest in you? I shouldn't have supposed, from what I have heard of him, that there was much of the philanthropist about the major."

"But you don't suppose, Fox, I'm going to undertake to marry a woman in that sort of way; a girl whom I've never seen?"

"Well, why the deuce don't you see her? She may be a vision of light, an embodiment of grace and beauty, a perfect houri, for all you can tell."

"But I tell you I don't want to marry."

"My dear Charlie, it's no use at your time of life talking about what you don't want to do; we're all the victims of circumstances. The world, in the shape of your creditors, requires you to sacrifice yourself on what is usually termed the hymeneal altar. Don't be indecorous; you've had your fling. It's quite time you were settled."

"How nice you talk!" said Detfield, laughing in spite of himself. "I wonder how you'd like it?"

"I might not like it, sir," replied Fox, with the utmost gravity; "but if it was imparted to me that a bride and riches were awaiting my acceptance, I should certainly display resignation, and think it my duty to society to throw no obstacles in the way of what society would, no doubt, deem so desirable."

"Very well, old fellow, I shall be delighted to resign in your favor. In the mean time, remember I want to know what you can make out about Claxby Jenkens. Now I must be going."

"Yes; but, Charlie, you're not in a condition to resign. Resignation in your case means not going to the country, but going to that most unappeasable constituency, your creditors. Bribery is the only thing that will content them. Bribery is a question of money; so go, my friend, bow to your destiny, and marry."

"No, Fox, I'll leave that to you," said Charlie, gayly, as he took up his hat, "and in the mean time—"

"You'll probably make a further mess of it," observed Brine, quietly.

"Play the devil with the third act, in short; perhaps so; we shall see;" and with a careless nod Detfield took his departure.

"It's a rum thing; but then rum things are always coming about," mused Mr. Brine. "Old Jenkens interesting himself in Charlie Detfield is what may be denominated an uncommonly rum thing. But as for drama, Charlie's not going to spoil that. I'm not going to be confined to facts, and I'll marry him on paper, in the third act, whatever he may think fit to do in reality."

CHAPTER X.

THE MISSES STANBURY.

BRANSBURY PARK, Islington, is a thoroughfare of unmistakable respectability. The houses all look well-to-do, as if they were the homes of thriving citizens, with comfortable balances at their bankers. Plenty of plate-glass to be seen in the dressing-room windows; flowers carefully cultivated on the balconies. The gardens running up from the roadway to the front door are all neat, trim, and natty, bright with blossom in the summer-time, and filled with shrubs in the winter. Barnsbury park is evidently addicted to floriculture, and makes the most of the limited ground at its command. One house in particular there seemed to pride itself upon its garden, its windows, and a small conservatory that was built over its porch. It the season it was gay past conception with roses, azaleas, and all sorts of hot-house plants; the balconies were filled with them, the little garden was a blaze of color, and the aforesaid conservatory thronged with delicate ferns and other rare specimens. In the winter-time the cunning of the gardener filled the beds with dwarf hollies all glittering with their crimson berries, with glossy-leaved Portugal laurels, and other evergreens, so that even then it did not look bare, dank, and melancholy, as gardens are wont to do at that time of year.

In the house, as was well known to the neighborhood, resided two maiden ladies, of the name of Stanbury. Of the Misses Stanbury's antecedents Bransbury park knew nothing, and cared less. They had taken possession of Roseneath House some ten or twelve years back, were evidently possessed of ample means, paid their bills regularly, and attended church with undeviating punctiliousness; had indeed rather a penchant

for clergymen's society, were thought to hold themselves somewhat high, and were vaguely reputed to be of good family. In fact, the Misses Stanbury were sometimes considered to give themselves airs on the strength of their presumed aristocratic connections; otherwise they were two harmless, elderly ladies, with a great love for gossip, cards, and rather full-flavored religion.

Of course they were not altogether alike; no two people ever are in this world, much as their tastes may assimilate. Miss Matilda was the less worldly of the two; more given to gossip and good works than her sister. Miss Clementina had carnal inclinations with regard to cards and light suppers in a more pronounced degree than Miss Matilda. But on two points there was not a pin to choose between them, namely, their extreme passion for flowers, and their preposterous admiration of their niece Bessie.

It is true that there were extenuating circumstances; but still the way these two old ladies did combine to pet and spoil Bessie Stanbury, just turned of eighteen, was a sorrowful sight to see. Bessie, with her quaint, whimsical ways, had not altogether succumbed to it as yet; but who shall say how long, at her age, it will be before she deteriorates? There is not an atom of selfishness about Bessie; and that is a considerable safeguard to her, under the circumstances. Meanwhile, in her own airy fashion, she tyrannizes over her supposed guardians to their extreme delectation.

A good-looking girl one would say, regarding her as she sits sipping her tea, this dull November afternoon. Her close-fitting riding-habit shows a neat, trim figure, and, as she has thrown off her hat, the thick coils of her brown hair are exposed to view. A bright, quick face, lit by laughing hazel eyes, straightish brows, *nez retroussée*, and a very pretty mouth, — such is Bessie Stanbury.

"Yes, Aunt Clem, I did enjoy my canter. I always do, you know, but as I said before, Barnsbury park is a little dull."

"Why, my dear child, what would you have? I'm sure we are always going out."

"Exactly; but then, you see, Aunt Clem, your goings out and my goings out are not quite the same things. You know I like dancing better than cards. Now Barnsbury park, like that dreadful dragoon regiment, I forget which it was, don't dance."

"You're a great deal too volatile, Bessie," interposed Miss Matilda, laughing. "A round game and people to talk to was considered quite dissipation enough for a puss of eighteen in my time."

"But, Aunt Matilda," rejoined Bessie, with mock gravity, "things are changed since your time, and really in these days it is a slur upon a young woman not to have indulged in a little valsing. I do think you will have to give a ball on my account."

"A ball!" exclaimed Miss Matilda.

"My dear Bessie!" ejaculated Aunt Clem.

"Well, you know, it needn't be quite a ball. We'll call it a dance, and then it won't sound so tremendous."

"Good gracious! what would Mr. Holdenough say?" cried Miss Matilda.

"And Mr. Boxby," chimed in Aunt Clem.

"Say nothing, but come, if we invited them. That's not the difficulty. It is much more serious. Where are we to find the young men?"

"I won't have any young men about my place," observed Miss Matilda, with a toss of her head.

"'Oh dear! what's to become of me,
Oh dear! what shall I do?'"

sang Bessie, with eyes brimming over with laughter.

"You must, Aunt Tilda. I know they are objectionable. They will light their cigars in the hall, — horrid things! — as they go away; but you see we girls can't get on without them when it comes to dancing, and they are useful in other ways, you know."

"In what way, miss, I should like to be informed?" demanded Miss Matilda, austerely.

"Well, auntie, I can't say exactly; but they get tickets for things, you see, and they tell us what is going on, and — and — and — in short, there is a good deal of information to be picked up from them," concluded Bessie, with a peal of laughter, — clear, ringing, musical laughter, that spoke of youth with high hope and trust in the world before it.

"Mr. Roxby was saying the other day that we ought to mix more in society, on Bessie's account," observed Aunt Clem, meditatively.

"Never mind Mr. Roxby," returned that young lady, gayly. "Don't trouble your heads on Bessie's account, till Bessie herself begins chattering about what she wants. As you know by sad experience, Aunt Clem, she calls out pretty soon for anything she fancies. You needn't be afraid she'll leave you in ignorance. There's a kiss for you," continued Miss Stanbury, giving her aunt a hug, "and now I must run away and take off my habit."

"I dare say it is rather dull for a bright young thing like her," said Miss Clementina, as the door closed on Bessie. "Our little card parties and so on can't be much fun for her."

"Yes, sister, I'll admit that," returned Miss Matilda, "but we really cannot have a ball here. It's preposterous; not to be thought of."

"I don't think Bessie quite meant that," observed Miss Clementina, with a quiet smile. "It was only her fun."

The two aunts differed very much in this. Miss Matilda never could see through her niece's badinage, but took it all quite seriously, while Miss Clementina did in great measure understand it, and enjoyed it in her quiet way immensely. There is usually a suspicion of truth in most badinage, and in many cases a good deal more than that. Few of us but can recall schemes or ideas mooted in jest, which after events showed the speaker must have had very much at heart.

"You see, Matilda," continued Aunt Clem, after a short pause, "although I don't think Bessie the least in earnest about a ball, I do think she would be very pleased if

we gave a little dance, though I don't believe she really dreams of our doing such a thing."

"But we cannot have a lot of supercilious young men about here, sneering at our quiet, old-fashioned arrangements, and the young men of these days are incessantly turning up their noses; nothing is ever good enough for them, and their noses never come down. They are very inferior to the young men of our day, Clem."

Alas! it always is so, everything deteriorates as youth ebbs from us.

"The cows gave then a sweeter cream,
And swifter ran the miller's stream;
Far larger grapes from vines were swung;
For boys were braver to all eyes,
And girls did not poor youth despise,
In twenty-two, when I was young."

"I don't know," replied Aunt Clem, smiling. "Luckily Bessie can't compare them and see how inferior they are. Besides, Matilda, how is she ever going to get a husband if she doesn't meet with young men?"

"A child like her doesn't want a husband. I do hope, Clementina, you haven't been putting ridiculous ideas into her head."

"Oh, dear!" laughed Aunt Clem, "such ideas want no putting into a girl's head; they're implanted there by nature. But though she mayn't want a husband yet, still she will some day. Remember she's an heiress, and ought to have more opportunity of selection than our humdrum life affords her."

"I don't consider our life humdrum, and have no doubt that Bessie will find a wooer quite soon enough," retorted Matilda, with much asperity.

"What's that about, Bessie?" exclaimed the young lady in question, as she once more entered the room. "What's Bessie done, or about to do?"

"Take a book, and hold her tongue, I trust," retorted Miss Matilda, tartly.

The girl opened her eyes, and glanced with mute inquiry to Miss Clementina; but that lady only shook her head, and elevated her eyebrows slightly.

Bessie paused for a second, then marched deliberately across to Miss Matilda's chair and knelt beside it.

"Now, aunt," she said, gayly, "let's have it out at once. What have I done? I'll not be in disgrace without knowing why. What is it?"

Terrible to confront are these frank, direct people. To state in precise terms the offending of all those who incur our displeasure would occasion a good deal of humming, hawing, and, it is to be feared, invention on the part of most of us in the course of twelve months. When we have wrought ourselves up to the pitch of a very pretty quarrel, it is dreadfully embarrassing to be called on to state our grounds for it.

Miss Matilda felt nonplussed. She had a vague feeling of being aggrieved, and a still more misty idea that Bessie was the culprit. She felt a little out of temper, and

wanted a scapegoat, that was all. But here was the terrible scapegoat requesting an abstract of the charges preferred against her. Who ever heard of such conduct on the part of a scapegoat? For my part, I quite feel for Miss Matilda. I don't see how ill-humor is to be vented, or how we can ever quarrel comfortably with our neighbors, if an explanation is to be insisted on in the very first stage. We cannot humbug ourselves about the real reason then, usually entirely different from that we have taught ourselves to believe some few weeks later.

"Done, child?" said Miss Matilda; "nothing; that is to say, more than I am accustomed to on your part. You've talked nonsense."

"Oh, my! aunt; if that's all," laughed Bessie, "I don't think I can be in such disgrace. But what was it?"

"Well, *I* can't have any dancing here, sauce-box," replied Miss Matilda, melting rapidly, as her niece fondled her hand.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" returned Bessie, springing to her feet. "Now, Aunt Clem, you will have to subdue *your* thirsting for a quadrille. And, as for me, I must exorcise those 'Fille de Mme. Angot valses' from my brain. Here's the head of the house says she'll have none of such frivolities. I tell you what, Aunt Matilda, either sell or make fire-wood of the piano. We'll put away all temptation from within the gates, and give the street organs notice of legal proceedings if they come here with their jig-a-jig tunes. We're going to be good—very good—good surpassing all calculation. What would you have me wear, aunt, during that period of repentance?"

"Sit down, and let's have a truce to your nonsense," replied Miss Matilda, smiling, and with an inward conviction that Bessie would prove too much for her, and that Roseneath House would entertain dancers after all.

"Ah, yes, Aunt Clem and I must commence reformation henceforth. Peas in their shoes is the only fit punishment for people with such dreadful ideas."

"I don't see why we shouldn't give a little dance," said Miss Clementina, musingly.

"My dear Clementina!" said Aunt Matilda, in tones of expostulation, a good deal more mellowed all the same, than those in which she had met the first proposal of such a thing.

"I'm shocked at you, Aunt Clem," said Bessie. "I trust the head of the house doesn't think I'm an abettor of your dissipated views;" and the girl threw herself back in a chair, and indulged in a low, gurgling laugh, irresistibly catching.

The elder ladies gradually took the infection and joined in it.

"It's the old story, Clementina," cried Miss Matilda, at length. "I suppose this spoilt child must have her own way."

"No dancing on my account, please," retorted Bessie, demurely. "Life has, I am aware, higher objects than pointing your toe. Still, if *you* insist upon giving a ball, Aunt Matilda, I know I shall do my duty, and I can *valse* if required."

"Oh, well, Bessie, if you really don't care about it—"

"But I do care about it, you dear old aunt," cried Miss Bessie, springing to her feet, and making a tumultuous dash at Miss Matilda. "There," she continued, kissing

her, "that's settled, we're to have a dance. How big, we don't know — nobody ever does, I believe, when they first contemplate taking up the carpet."

"Take up the carpet, my dear Bessie? — I didn't intend that."

"No, but you see it would be so bad for the carpet if it was left down; we might dance holes in it. Think of that. Now, if we come to the boards, we shall only dance holes in our shoes."

"We had better do the thing properly while we are about it," chimed in Aunt Clem.

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Bessie, "and it won't bother you a bit, Aunt Matilda. It's only locking yourself up in your bedroom for two days, or having a couple of afternoons at the South Kensington Exhibition."

Miss Matilda, her little fit of ill-temper now thoroughly dissipated, could not help laughing at her niece's proposition, but rejoined: —

"No, Bessie, I think I had better stop and help superintend the arrangements. My old head may turn out useful."

"Of course you will be useful, invaluable," cried Bessie. "What fun it will be, planning it all! Why, we shall have two or three days' immense amusement contriving before this comes to pass. You, I, and Aunt Clem, how busy we will be!" and then the girl stole her arm gently round Miss Matilda's waist, and said softly, "and how good you both are to me."

"Go away with you, you little wheedler," rejoined Miss Stanbury, with a mock affectation of austerity. "I have always remarked that concession invariably leads to further requirements where you are concerned; you get no more out of me to-night, miss. Heaven only knows what you'll be wanting next! Coote and Tinney's band, or some similar absurdity. You had best try what you can make of Aunt Clem, now, and I give her warning," continued Miss Matilda, raising her voice, "that what she pledges herself to, she does upon her own responsibility, and at her own personal risk and expense."

"I can't do anything more with her to-night," cried the girl, laughing merrily. "She's pledged to give a ball, and that's enough for the present. If she's mean, Aunt Clem, when it comes to details, you and I will have to run our credit in the neighborhood. For the Roseneath ball must not, shall not, and cannot prove a failure."

And so came about a ball which will have something to do with the course of this history.

CHAPTER XI.

GOOD COUNSEL.

MRS. PAYNTER has thought a good deal over her interview with Major Claxby Jenkens. She has questioned Charlie Detfield pretty sharply about his relations with that gallant officer, but is fain to confess that she has not gathered much information concerning them.

"Yes," Charlie said, "of course he knew him,—one of those sort of fellows everybody knew. Who was he? That was just what it was. Kind of fellow you never did know anything about. He had had some sort of business transactions with him; was talking to him the other day about buying that horse of Packenham's, but they couldn't deal. Jenkens does a good deal on commission in the buying and selling way," remarked Charlie.

"Well, but is he a friend of yours?" inquired Mrs. Paynter, pertinaciously.

"Certainly not," replied Detfield; "an acquaintance, nothing more."

"It's very odd," thought Mrs. Paynter.

"It's very odd," thought Charlie Detfield; "what has put this idea into her head?" and in his turn he inquired "what she knew about Major Jenkens."

But Mrs. Paynter had not as yet made up her mind, and she refused to tell him anything; laughed it off, and said that was her secret. One of these days, perhaps, he would be married, and then she would confess it all to his wife. To which Charlie had promptly replied, that, though he had no intention of committing matrimony just then, he'd prefer that these secrets of his bachelor days should be buried in oblivion; although what this particular secret might be he did not pretend to guess. Still Mrs. Paynter, working out this problem with all a woman's quiet, steady persistency, did easily arrive at the certainty of what she had already suspected; namely, that Charlie Detfield was in desperate difficulties; in short, as one of her informants told her, "had shot his bolt."

Coquette, yes, she was, and could not help it. The game of flirtation was the essence of life to her; but for all that she was not a bad woman. She was not of that kind who, merciless in their hour of triumph, look with pitiless disdain upon their writhing victim. Lizzie was wont to be stricken with remorse when her admirers were too seriously wounded. She didn't mean that. Why could they not content themselves with a little sentiment, as she did, instead of making the terrible mistake of getting so dreadfully in earnest? Although, as before said, she was too hardened a flirt not to somewhat enjoy a scene at the time, yet she had her moments of penitence afterwards; more especially, too, was she always anxious to part friends on these occasions; and, as a rule, she succeeded.

She was a very curious combination of good and evil, a combination much more common in this world than perhaps is usually credited. People in their inexorable judgment of appearances will be hard of belief that one of the most reckless flirts it is possible to conceive could in reality be true and loyal to her husband. And yet they will readily admit similar social problems without question. When one of our commercial lights has first flirted, and finally run away with other folks' moneys, there are never wanting friends to descant on his domestic virtues. Still, as the costermonger remarked, upon selling the pineapple, "everything in this world goes by appearances;" and if you would be credited with virtue, you must, at all events, give no occasion for scandal.

Mrs. Paynter, too, is just now extremely interested in Montague Gore's palpable

devotion to the fair widow, and awaits the *dénouement* with considerable impatience. "Quite evident," thinks Lizzie, "that he will speak whenever Cissy chooses to make him. Why does she delay? It is true that they couldn't be married for another six months. I suppose the proprieties must be observed, even when your late husband was an ill-tempered, ill-bred brute. But with her miserable prospects I should think it would be a comfort to get something definitely settled; and yet she goes on as calmly confident about her future as if the whole thing was assured. Poor darling! Why, she hasn't even got a parish to come down upon; for she has no idea where she was born, beyond that it was in England." And once more Mrs. Paynter's mind was exercised as to whether Cissy was deep, past all calculation, or next door to a fool. "And yet she can't be the latter," thought Lizzie. "I never hear people complain that she cannot talk; that they are unable to get on with her. On the contrary, wherever I have taken her, people seemed charmed with her piquant, graceful manners. It is true, in consequence of her mourning, I have not been able to do much for her in that line as yet; still I know, from what I have seen, that society hold her quick enough."

But Mrs. Paynter's attention was destined to be, for a little time, thoroughly absorbed in Captain Detfield's affairs. Although she had boldly asserted to the major that, if Charlie's extrication from his difficulties was to be accomplished by matrimony, she was quite as capable of finding him a wife as any one, yet, when she came to reflect upon it, she was forced to admit that she could not call to mind any eligible lady just at present. She could not make up her mind as to whether she would ally herself with the major or not. If she could but be certain that he was honestly striving to help Charlie in the only feasible manner that occurred to him, well, then she would exert all her influence to induce that impoverished guardsman to comply with Major Jenkens' wishes. "Yes," she said, with a sigh, and putting on an aspect of touching resignation, "I will sacrifice my own feelings to save him. He shall marry this red-haired, red-elbowed woman, who has been discovered for him, and I trust he will be happy and — more prudent."

Why Mrs. Paynter should picture the unknown heiress as possessed of these unprepossessing attributes, one can't say; but she derived much comfort and support from having so imaged her. She had worked herself quite up to the belief that she was about to make a stupendous sacrifice for the sake of the man she loved, and pleased herself by picturing up a most pathetic parting scene with Charlie Detfield.

There was more imagination than heart in Lizzie's *affaires de cœur* always, but one thing she was in earnest about. She was willing to resign her admirer for his own interest; but she kept back, even from herself, as yet, one important condition, namely, that it must be to a woman whom she could not possibly regard as a rival. She had told Major Jenkens that she would see this bride he had elected for Detfield, and still held firmly to that idea as a *sine qua non* of giving him her support.

She had said that she would write to him when she had made up her mind, but of course she had not done so, and had good grounds for refraining. It was evident, from what she had gathered, that this man was no friend of Charlie's. What, then,

made him take such an interest in this marriage? She had lived too much in the world not to suppose that he must have some scheme of his own to serve in doing so, and naturally divined that this might not tend very much to Captain Detfield's advantage. Once make her clearly understand that it really was for his benefit, and Lizzie was just the woman with generosity to ignore herself and not stand in the way. She knew perfectly, that her influence, at present, over Charlie was quite sufficient to crush such a design easily; but then, though she liked him, it was in her own butterfly fashion, and her feelings were by no means so deeply involved as to prevent her proving a true friend to him, should circumstances give opportunity.

A month and more has gone by since the major's visit, and Lizzie has almost forgotten it, though she had thought much over it for some days after it had occurred. One morning she received a note, which brought back the affair vividly to her memory. Persevering as a mole this major, and like that mysterious animal, strong, pugnacious, unscrupulous, and given to underground practices. Lizzie opened her note and read:—

"MADAM, — Not having had the honor of hearing from you, it is fair to presume that you do not as yet see your way into supplying Captain Detfield with that great desideratum of all men's lives — money. I did myself the honor to point out to you, in the interview you were so good as to accord me, that it was not only an essential, but a speedy essential, to him. On the supposition that you have no scheme in hand for his relief at present, would you undertake to persuade him to accept the accompanying invitation? It can do him no harm; it may benefit him considerably.

"Trusting that you will abstain from mentioning my name at present in this matter,

"I have the honor to be,

"Your obliged and obedient servant,

"CLAXBY JENKENS.

"6 Charles street, Berkeley square."

"Well," mused Mrs. Paynter, "no harm can come of his accepting an invitation to a —, what is it? Let me see," and Lizzie took up the accompanying card. "'The Misses Stanburys at home. Dancing at nine. Roseneath House, Barnsbury park, Islington.' This is getting mysterious. Who ever would have dreamed of seeking an heiress out Islington way? Yes; Charlie must go. Right or wrong, we must investigate this. I am getting horribly curious to have a look at this daughter of ingots. Charlie can't come to grief in attending a dance, I think; but, to make all things safe, I'll attend it too. I'll take very good care that he don't propose that night, at all events. Impudent thing! — perhaps she'll ask him. Well, if she does, I'll undertake he says no. Oh dear! this will be tremendous fun. Who ever heard of a woman chaperoning an admirer before? — and that's what I intend to do. Now for my friend the major. I dare say he thinks I shall commit myself, more or less; but he'll be mis-

taken;" and then Lizzie laughed, and, sitting down at her desk, politely informed Major Jenkens that she regretted she could be of no assistance to him in this matter. "Had I been fortunate enough myself to receive a card for the Misses Stanburys' dance, I might, perhaps, have asked Captain Detfield to accompany us; but as things are, I am sorry to say I can render you no help whatever."

"A clever woman," muttered the major, when he received this note, "and determined to *see*, evidently. Now I'd rather she didn't, for, from what Roxby tells me, Miss Stanbury's a trifle too good-looking to enlist her sympathies. Well, it cuts both ways; if it makes it more difficult with Mrs. Paynter, it'll smooth matters with the captain. Hum—yes, by Jove! I've an idea. I don't know, madam, but I think Claxby Jenkens may prove just one too many for you all the same;" and the major chuckled to himself with considerable gusto, as he enclosed a card for the Roseneath dance to his fair but dubious ally.

Of course, Mrs. Paynter felt pretty well assured that this would come. The next thing to be done was to entrap the unconscious victim. "Not much difficulty about it," thinks Lizzie. "If he doesn't turn up for afternoon tea to-day, he will to-morrow, most probably."

Charlie is pretty regular in his devotion, and seldom allows two days to pass without doing homage at the tea-table of his fair enchantress. As Mrs. Paynter anticipated, a little after five Captain Detfield is ushered into her cosey drawing-room, and, having made his salutations, proceeds to establish himself in an arm-chair near the fire that he particularly affects.

"Yes; you will do there very nicely," remarked Lizzie, laughing. "I have noticed that when you are installed in that seat you are usually too lazy to get out of it, unless either force of circumstances or peremptory commands impel you to the effort."

"It is a very comfortable chair; and you know, lady fair, that I am never so happy as when basking in the sunshine of your presence."

"Ah, well! you are at liberty to bask for a little, because, you see, I have something to say to you. Will you come with us to a dance Friday week?"

"Only too charmed to attend any festival in your society, as, however dreary such festival may ultimately turn out, I, at least, shall be safe," replied Charlie.

"Very good, sir; then we will give you some dinner here on Friday, and afterwards you shall accompany us to the wilds of Islington."

"Islington! what on earth takes you to Islington? Deuced odd, I've got a card from some Strawberries, — no, — Cranberries, to a dance up that way."

"Stanburys you mean; the very people."

"But how did you come to know them?" inquired Charlie, with some little curiosity.

"I don't know them as yet; but I hope to make their acquaintance by attending their dance. Very rich people, I'm told."

"I never heard of them before, and have no conception what induced them to

honor me with an invitation. Not likely I should have troubled them, if it had not been for the unexpected inducement you hold out."

"But you know you ought to go everywhere," replied Mrs. Paynter, gravely.

"So I do," laughed Charlie; "nobody can accuse me of playing the misanthrope."

"Yes," continued the lady, in serious tones. "It is getting time you were settled. You know you are getting desperately hard up, Charlie. Marriage is the only thing to give you a fair start again; so, of course, you must marry."

"This from you!" interposed Detfield.

"Naturally, who should you expect good advice from, if not from me? Young ladies of fortune require looking for; therefore, I repeat, your duty to yourself is to go everywhere—"

"And give young ladies of fortune an opportunity of selection," retorted Charlie, laughing. "Still, I never thought you would take an interest in my marriage."

"A woman always takes an interest in the future of a man who has been *interested* in her," observed Mrs. Paynter, demurely.

"Oh! you admit I have been that."

"Yes; will go further, and say you are still. Stop!" she continued, with an imperious gesture of her hand, as she saw he was about to speak. "I don't think you have ever been seriously *épris* with any woman. Of course, I admit your devotion to myself is the exception; but I am afraid that you might manage even to get over that in a case of emergency."

"And you are prepared to resign my homage at any moment?"

"I must not think of myself," rejoined the lady, plaintively. "It would be for your own good, you know."

Detfield paused for some minutes before he answered, gazing steadily into the fire meanwhile. He knew, in good truth, that this was no more than one of those butterfly liaisons in which his whole life had been passed; but it was a blow to his self-love to think that his devotion could be resigned so lightly. It was the first time he had encountered a woman so completely of his own calibre; a more thorough practitioner, indeed, in the science of flirtation than himself; a clever woman, too, whom he felt read him at sight. Still he had flattered himself that she would be wroth, at all events, at the bare idea of his seceding from his post of *cavaliere servente*—and yet she herself was coolly recommending that he should marry. Women don't do that if their feelings are much involved, Charlie knew full well. He was not anxious, perhaps, that Lizzie should arrive at that point regarding him. He had more than once encountered the difficulties of too *exigeante* a passion, and was aware that a woman's jealousy may ruffle the rose-leaves of life considerably. If you embark in illicit flirtation, you must encounter these experiences. Still he was not prepared to submit quietly to curt dismissal.

"I don't know about my own good at all," he replied, at length, somewhat brusquely. "It would seem that you, at all events, wish to get rid of me."

She had been studying his face keenly. She had guessed pretty well what was

running through his mind, but she was bent on carrying out her whim. She had no thought as yet of aiding the major's scheme, further than that she would satisfy her own curiosity, and see this girl it was proposed should be Detfield's bride.

"Unjust! unjust!" she murmured. "You're all alike, you always are. When we stifle our own feelings in order to honestly serve you, then you call us heartless, callous flirts."

"I did not say that," replied Charlie, quickly.

"As if it was necessary to be rude enough to say so," retorted Lizzie, petulantly; "as if a glance, a gesture, could not insinuate such meaning to any woman not absolutely a fool; as if, Captain Detfield, you had not, in your own mind, accused me of being all three during the last few minutes," concluded Mrs. Paynter, defiantly.

He knew that it was so, and rejoined, somewhat coolly:—

"Your alarming interest concerning my marriage naturally led me to think that you wished to be rid of me."

"Don't be foolish," she broke in, quickly. "I only wish to extricate you from your involvements; and even then, mind, I shall withhold my permission, unless she possesses one most necessary qualification."

"And that is?"

"Being tolerably plain," retorted Lizzie, laughing. "I don't want you to be able to break my chains altogether, you see. And now we are friends again, are we not? And you will come with us to this dance on Friday next?"

"Certainly, if you wish it; though what has put it into your head to conspire to marry me to a Gorgon, I can't conceive," remarked Charlie, rising.

"Your creditors, of course," retorted Mrs. Paynter, laughing; "but it's not so bad as that. I only insist on some one who shall not eclipse *me*. But I may make my mind easy. Wealth and beauty are not often found awaiting a wooer, and when they are—well, they expect a good deal in exchange. Good-by!"

"It seems to be growing on the community, generally, that I am to marry an El Dorado," mused Charlie, as he walked leisurely homewards. "Well, as the public seem to have taken my case up, I shall leave the public to settle that arrangement if they can. Personally, I decline to interfere with inevitable destiny in that fashion. I have remarked that some of those I know have not become particularly light-hearted after achieving it; not so cheery by half as they were in their old days of chronic insolvency."

CHAPTER XII.

TO WED OR NOT TO WED.

To vanish from the world we live in!—a thing at once so easy, so difficult of achievement. I am speaking of disappearance from that narrow circle which constitutes the world to most of us, not of leaving this terrestial globe of ours for the unknown land

that lies beyond. You shall try to be lost to all whom you have hitherto known; to cast behind you, to bury in oblivion, the life you have hitherto led. You shall take incredible precautions to leave no trace of where you have betaken yourself, and before six weeks are over some one or other of the most obnoxious of your acquaintance has stumbled upon your retreat and published it far and wide. Your motive for such retirement matters not. Whether you had a poem to complete, a great scientific discovery to work out; whether you had quarrelled with your wife, could no longer hit it off with your creditors, or were simply bored, — veritably sick of the old jog-trot circle in which you happen to move, — the fact remains the same; you wished to be lost and you failed utterly.

Again you shall depart from your home openly and avowedly for three days. Chance or caprice shall lead you to extend your holiday to six weeks. You shall take no care in the world to conceal your movements. You are simply too lazy to communicate with your friends, and you have vanished utterly from the knowledge of your own circle. Advertisements in the "Times," keen-eyed policemen dragging water where you are not, even the famous Pollaky himself, one and all are useless. Not a trace, not a sign, not a rumor of you, till you once more cross the domestic door-sill and send the wife of your bosom into hysterics.

Why is this? How is it that it would seem so much easier to disappear without taking precaution against being tracked, than when we seek to obliterate our footsteps? It is singular, Mr. Bauer, who went to Euston square with his portmanteau in broad daylight, telegraphing to his business friends in Manchester to advise them of his coming, is as completely lost as if the earth had opened and swallowed him; as indeed perhaps it may have done. On the other hand, those splendid criminals, the Bidwells, in spite of precautions, most elaborate plans, long before devised and carefully considered, fell one and all in the course of a few weeks into the hands of the hunters. Over-anxiety to succeed is constantly fatal to success; too great elaboration has marred many a promising conception, and it may be that such excessive care to leave no trace behind is the very thing that brings detection, that gives the clue so laboriously sought to be destroyed.

Major Claxby Jenkens had anticipated little difficulty in discovering Mr. Hemsworth's retreat, after reading that letter from his correspondent in Paris. The major had reasons of his own for wishing to know what had become of the widow, and never dreamed but such would be a very simple matter. To a man of his business habits and somewhat dubious pursuits the putting the necessary machinery in motion was very simple. He knew where to make inquiries in numberless channels, that it is not given to most people to be acquainted with; where to lay his hand on all sorts of agents that the world generally wotted not of. He had no trouble at all in finding out that she had left Paris for England, in ascertaining the very boat in which she had crossed the channel, and that she had taken a through ticket for London. But there all trace of her was lost. The huge city had swallowed her up, and beyond that the major could not get.

It puzzled him this.

"What reason could she have for concealment?" argued the major, putting the case hypothetically to himself, one morning, in his office. "Clearly none — at least, that I can imagine," he subjoined with habitual caution, "because one never can be sure what maggot may not have entered a woman's brain. She certainly took no trouble to conceal her movements, as, again, why should she? Left Paris suddenly, — well, after the utter smash consequent upon her husband's death, that was very natural. But why did she come to England? That I can't understand. Her disappearance here, I take it, is a matter of accident, not design. She's probably in London this moment, and a more difficult place to find any one you may want there doesn't happen to be in the universal globe. "I don't think they'd find me in London," mused the major, with a pleasant smile," if ever I should take a fancy to turn hermit. But this won't do. The logic of the case is what I must attend to. Of course, I might advertise; but that's clumsy, very;" and the major shook his head deprecatingly, as if the suggestion had come from some neophyte in the science of doing your "duty towards your neighbor." "No! who on earth would she be likely to communicate with in this country? that is the question. — She might, — yes, by Jove! she might, — no, that's not probable, either; at all events, I could soon ascertain that. Stop! Doesn't Rayner say that he understands an English barrister had a good deal to do with the winding up of her affairs? Where's the letter?" and the major turned sharply to his desk.

Little trouble had he in finding the letter he sought, amid those regular, carefully labelled pigeon-holes. A man, this, of methodical, orderly habits, docketing his very invitations to dinner.

"Yes, I thought so; but Rayner does not mention his name. Don't know it, perhaps. Still, if he was arranging her affairs, there must be plenty of Mark Hemsworth's creditors who do; there can be little difficulty about getting at that. I will write to Rayner to-day, and tell him to ascertain all he can, and let me know as quickly as possible. That affair's disposed of for the present. Now for the other;" and the major fell into a deep reverie.

"Yes," he muttered, at length, "I think that will do if I can come to terms with Roxby; that sanctimonious old sinner is harder to deal with than any other man I ever came across yet. There are not many men who can say they've had the best of Claxby Jenkens since he cut his wisdom-teeth, but he happens to be one of them. No, if we are to be partners this time, I'll have my fair half of the stakes, or throw up my hand before the game's played out. I've put it all in training and hold the strings; but the puppets shan't dance, my dear Roxby, until you have thoroughly satisfied me. You're a most excellent man, a man, no doubt, held in high esteem by your neighbors," continued the major, with a low chuckle; "but your neighbors don't know you quite so well as I do. I could imagine you taking just a 'leetle' advantage of an old friend, if you saw your way. It will be my business to put temptation out of your reach. Yes, my dear Roxby, I'll tie you up pretty tight this time, you may

rest assured;" and the major's eyes glittered with a brightness suggestive of spectacles being a most unnecessary adjunct to their capacity for looking into things.

"As for Captain Detfield," continued the major, still pursuing his vein of thought, "he is much too deep in the hands of the money-lenders to refuse to do what he is bidden. It is not putting anything unpalatable to him, when you simply require him to marry a pretty girl with a fortune, and so discharge his liabilities. I can only say if he does give trouble, he'll find it unpleasant;" and the major's lips tightened in an ominous way, as he reflected on the possibility of contumacy on the part of Charlie Detfield. "It's dangerous working with such an uncertain ally as Mrs. Paynter, no doubt; but, bah! you must risk something. My interview the other day told me two things: first, that her regard for Detfield was one of those illusive passions which women take up, as they do a new fashion; secondly, that the excitement of intrigue is the dominant force in her character. I intend to gratify it. I could hardly have managed Detfield cleverly at this stage of the business without assistance. The next thing will be to hoodwink her, or else she will spoil my game, probably. She's a clever woman, but I flatter myself when she drives home from Roseneath House next Friday, she will be committed to a little conspiracy which she will be far from comprehending. Might be awkward, indeed, if she did understand it prematurely," thought the major.

But while Major Jenkens is making such strenuous search for Mrs. Hemsworth, comfortably located, as we know, within a mile of him, Montague Gore is also straining every nerve to trace the antecedents of Mark Hemsworth. It is curious these two men have never met, although they have more than one mutual acquaintance, and yet at the present moment, each is in possession of the information for which the other is so diligently seeking. Such things occur more often in life than would be credited. Have you never anxiously sought for information in every direction, and finally discovered that the most unlikely man of your acquaintance was perfectly competent to tell you all that you wanted to know? Have you ever spent days searching for a quotation that has caught your fancy, and after ransacking all likely writers in vain, suddenly met it again in some newspaper or periodical, with the name of the author tacked comfortably to it? There are some people whom you can never move without meeting, Piccadilly or Palmyra, Ascot Heath or the Arctic seas, you know you are certain to come across them. There are others you hear about all your life, and never see. All your friends know them. You are continually leaving a house forty-eight hours before their arrival, or arriving forty-eight hours after their departure. You have been asked to meet them time after time, in all sorts of ways; but you have never met. It has looked a certainty very often that you would do so, but somehow it has never come to pass. If you are of a reflective turn of mind you know now that it never will. Your kismet is written, and among other things, it is preordained that you and they shall never clasp palms.

Montague Gore has made but slight way in his inquiries as yet. Cissy can give him no information as to what part of England her husband had belonged to. She

knew, indeed, nothing of his life previous to their marriage. Mark Hemsworth had treated her always as a mere child; whether she were in favor or disgrace, it made no difference. She was to him not a wife, but a plaything. When he was in good humor he would lavish jewels and laces upon her. When things crossed him he would spare neither gibe nor jeer at her expense. In spite of its outward luxury Cissy's life had been no bed of roses. In all that gorgeous glitter in which her last five years had been passed there had been a cynical worldliness that had often repelled her. She had craved, as women always will, for sympathy of some sort. She had made no friend in all that time to whom she could speak unreservedly — there was no one of her own sex to whom she could open out her heart. Frank as she was in manner, yet hers was one of those self-contained natures that keep their feelings under control, and show but rarely the inner springs that move them. They yield not their confidence lightly, and make no parade of such sorrows as may befall them. It was partly the isolation of her lot, and Mrs. Paynter's caressing manner that had attracted her towards that lady, when she first made her acquaintance in Paris. Then, too, Lizzie was English, and that had some influence over her; for in the set in which Cissy habitually lived, English ladies were not much wont to mingle. If the society in which she mixed was wealthy, it savored very much of the Bourse, and rather lacked refinement. It had taught her in five years two things: to dress and to spend money; a University education in our own country produces at times no more definite results.

It was a good deal to the credit of Cissy's natural disposition that it had taught her to do no worse. Quite possible to have come out of such an ordeal vicious, instead of merely frivolous. Cissy regarded life, at present, as a scene in which it was incumbent upon her to be always well-dressed and well-mannered. She fears *ennui* at twenty-two considerably more than she does destitution, and this in the circumstances in which we know she is placed; and yet this woman is not a fool. But she has never known so far what it is to have to think about money, and is as calmly convinced that some one will marry her and spare her all trouble on that head, as if she were already affianced to a millionnaire.

Remember, she married as a portionless girl, without the slightest difficulty; that she has been fêted all her life; that she has been accustomed to hear of large sums made daily by those with whom she associated; that she has constantly seen her husband's reckless speculating friends choose for their brides, pretty, dowerless girls, and the thing becomes not altogether so unnatural as it at first sounds. Cissy, judging by the lights of her own world, thinks that the acquirement of riches is a very easy and every-day affair. She would, perhaps, sum up her ideas in this fashion: "that when a man wants money, he goes into business and makes it." The going forth in search of wool and coming home shorn is a phase of commercial transactions of which she has no experience. The free lances of the Stock Exchange, like "the plungers" of the turf, are jubilant in their hour of triumph, but mute when the battle goes

against them for the most part. It is the men, too, who are always lamenting their losses that wax rich steadily.

Montague Gore is busily engaged in trying to trace out Mark Hemsworth's family in England. This he thinks is the first thing to be done, in order to clear up that doubtful point, as to whether Cissy ever had a marriage settlement. Evidently no trace of such a settlement is to be got out of all that Paris tangle; nothing, indeed, to warrant such a notion, but that one memorandum of the dead man's. What irritates him and troubles him considerably is Cissy's resolute refusal to tell him her father's name. Where he may be, she admits she has no conception; but that he could determine this matter stands to reason. What can be her object in declining to tell his name? He has pressed this more than once, pointed out that it is so obviously the most direct way to get at what they want. But Cissy is inflexible. She has her reasons, she says; is very grateful for what he has already done, but help him in that way she cannot. If that is a necessity, if he sees no other way of arriving at the truth save by that channel, well, then he must abandon his exertions in her behalf. She is very firm on this point. Equally reticent, too, concerning her early days; of her life previous to entering the convent Cissy will say nothing.

The more he looks at it from the worldly and common-sense point of view, the more convinced Montague Gore is of the madness of his infatuation for Cissy Hemsworth. But it is not to be supposed that common sense is likely to be an antidote to the fatal philtre of the love-god. She is extravagant, she is half his age, and is no one knows who. If he marries, he should obtain either money, connection, or at least congenial companionship. There are fifty reasons why he should not marry Cissy; there is but one why he should. He loves her—and in the meridian of life, is that to be deemed valid excuse for imprudent marriage? He argues the case over and over again with himself, dwelling sternly on each objection the match as he recapitulates them; but his going up to Hanover street daily is that pennyworth of fact which is ever worth all the theories in the world. When a man argues about the imprudence of becoming *lié* with a woman, and continues to frequent her drawing-rooms, he can bamboozle no one but himself. He offers but another sad example of theoretical wisdom and practical folly.

Still Montague Gore hesitates to speak. He has not resolution to fly temptation, though his eyes are open to the imprudence of what he half contemplates doing. He soothes himself with the idea that it is necessary that he should see Mrs. Hemsworth constantly on business; though, considering that the very little she has to tell she systematically refuses to open her lips about, and that his inquiries have as yet come to nothing, there does not seem much necessity for continual consultation between them. Sometimes he wonders what answer Cissy would make to him. He has the field all to himself, which is something, and she always welcomes him warmly, it is true; but Montague Gore cannot as yet flatter himself that Cissy's feelings are involved, as far as he is concerned. Her bright smile, frank, out-stretched hand, and soft voice greet him with evident pleasure whenever he calls; but the voice never falters, the

cheek never changes, the hand never trembles. Montague Gore read aright, when he deemed Cissy's heart still in her own keeping.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BALL AT ROSENEATH HOUSE.

"Time treads o'er the graves of affection;
Sweet honey is turned into gall;
Perhaps you have no recollection
That ever you danced at our ball."

ROSENEATH HOUSE is a blaze of light, and a perfect grove of evergreens. Once Miss Matilda had made up her mind that a dance should be, and she was just the woman to throw herself heart and soul into it. An energetic woman, not liking to be thrown out of her groove to start with, but that difficulty once overcome, one who determined that what she undertook should be carried out thoroughly. Bessie's trustee, Mr. Roxby, a great authority with her, had pronounced strongly in favor of the dance when consulted. That Mr. Roxby had his own ends to serve we know, but of course Miss Stansbury did not. He said it was only right that his ward should see a little more of the world, and hinted that it was Bessie's aunts who should afford her some opportunity of doing so.

Mr. Roxby's word was law with Miss Matilda. His verdict being for a ball, Miss Stansbury made up her mind that Roseneath House should entertain on a grand scale, and led her sister and Bessie a troublous time of it. And yet they enjoyed it thoroughly. Although the preparations involved, as Bessie had laughingly predicted, picnicing at uncertain hours, bivouacking on staircases, and all those attendant sorrows inseparable from small establishments when they plunge into large entertainments, still Miss Matilda was in great force. She quite harried Aunt Clem and Bessie, indeed, in her ceaseless supervision, making those two originators of the affair race up and down stairs till they declared they could do so no longer; dashing into their bedrooms, at untimely hours, with new conceptions, and accusing them of laziness and lukewarmness concerning the whole thing, in a way that made Bessie declare she knew Aunt Matilda looked forward to dancing all night.

When you have infinite wealth at your disposal, you simply say: "Let there be a ball, and there is a ball." But to smaller people, a ball involves much thought, manipulation, worry and upsetting of the establishment. However, the ball at Roseneath House is now a fact accomplished. The lamps are lit, the floors are swept, the band is tuning its instruments, and the hostesses, clad in silks and satins, are awaiting their guests.

There is a considerable difference in the age and appearance of the spinsters. Aunt

Matilda, turned of forty, and arrayed in stately lace and velvet, awaits the coming of the multitude with serene composure. Aunt Clem, a good half-dozen years her junior, is dressed more youthfully, in satin, and exhibits some tremor and nervousness. Aunt Clem does not consider her dancing days over as yet — has, perhaps, indeed, a still lurking idea that she has not yet passed the marriageable age, and who shall say what to-night may bring forth. Indeed, she carries her years well, and might pass easily for somewhat less than she actually is, — a pleasant, fair face, with kindly, honest, blue eyes shining out of it. A middle-aged man might do worse than ask Aunt Clem to tread life's path with him. But then, middle-aged men have always a tendency to select a bride from the juvenile ranks, — a mistake usually paid for on one side or the other.

As for Bessie, arrayed in a cloud of white tarlatan, trimmed with forget-me-nots and rosebuds, only an art-critic or a misogynist would deny her title to be called a pretty girl to-night. But now begins the rumbling of wheels, and the faint rustling in the hall that heralds the arrival of the guests. Foremost among these is Mr. Roxby, a tall, pompous man, with an amount of starched neckcloth round his throat that nothing but an unusually long neck enables him to look over, exhibiting a most capacious white waistcoat and voluminous shirt-front, with an air of paternal condescension. He makes his obeisance in a manner that indicates he takes the whole arrangements on his shoulders from this out; that he throws the ægis of his protection over the house for the night; shakes hands with the elder Misses Stanbury with lofty patronage, and touches Bessie's cheek with his lips, as if he did her much honor by so doing. His whole manner indicates that really this is a frivolous affair, in which he rather protests against being mixed up, but to oblige his old friends he will see that it goes off satisfactorily.

Mr. Roxby is a man of eminent respectability, — what men of the world sometimes call rather too respectable, having recollections of what dreadful backslidings such extreme respectability is occasionally convicted of. Mr. Roxby had started in life in a very humble way; he was not clever by any means. He had achieved success simply because he was so plausible and so respectable, and, though it would astonish his admirers considerably to learn it, so unscrupulous. Divested of his white waistcoat and paternal manner Mr. Roxby was a fraudulent humbug. He had never scrupled to turn money over any transaction that passed through his hands. He was just one of those men whom people are so fond of picking out as executor, trustee, arbiter, etc. Roxby had been continually figuring in one or other of these capacities all his life, stood indeed, at this present moment, as trustee to half-a-dozen different people. He generally contrived that all such appointments should conduce more or less to his advantage. Not that he ever made away with moneys that did not belong to him, he is too cautious for that; but he did usually contrive to have very tidy pickings out of such business as necessarily passed through his fingers.

Mr. Roxby, in pursuance of that unspoken pledge which had marked his greeting, takes up his position by Miss Stanbury, and proceeds to assist in the reception of the guests. So benignantly patronizing is he in that situation, that the strange element

which always turns up at a London dance, entertain no manner of doubt but that he is the master of the house, and do salutation accordingly. Even some of his friends who know the exact state of the case cannot refrain from complimenting Mr. Roxby on the tasteful arrangements, so completely has he taken the house under the protection of his capacious white waistcoat. Several invitations have indeed been sent out at his suggestion, and he has further been furnished at his own request with a few blank cards.

Among the early arrivals is Major Claxby Jenkens. The indefatigable major deems that the little drama he contemplates will need his immediate supervision.

The major is not wont to leave any affair, that he may take up, in other hands than his own more than is absolutely necessary. This, he considers, requires delicate manipulation, and, with the distrust he entertains of Roxby, it is not likely that he will take him into his confidence one iota more than he is obliged. The major's idea is simply to throw Detfield and Miss Bessie together, and trust in the first instance to the girl's making a favorable impression. He has arrived at a pretty correct notion concerning Detfield's *liaison* with Mrs. Paynter, and deems that a fresh face might easily extinguish that flirtation, providing Lizzie is not aroused into active opposition by jealousy of her rival. He is quite aware that her influence, at present, would be sufficient to hold Detfield to his allegiance, if she chose to exert it. But the major is a born intriguant. Such finessing as he contemplates affords him much amusement, and he is rather looking forward to his match with Mrs. Paynter than otherwise.

He enters quietly, his keen, restless eyes veiled beneath his delicately gold-rimmed spectacles, and says, "How d'ye do?" to Roxby, who presents him to his hostess and their niece. The major pays a few well-turned compliments to the elder ladies, studying Aunt Clem with considerable attention; then he glances at Bessie, threading the entanglements of the Lancers. "A very pretty, graceful girl," he mutters, "and the aunt quite passable, and young enough for my purpose; two honors in my hand the first shuffle of the cards," and the major, rubbing his hands softly, said, "he should like just a word with Mr. Roxby."

"What is it, my dear friend?" inquired the latter, as they drew a little on one side. "Be as quick as you can, please, as I am pledged to assist the Miss Stanburys in receiving their guests."

"One word only. Don't interfere with my proceeding in any way, and don't allow Mrs. Paynter to talk with the Miss Stanburys in the first instance. I think I see our way pretty clearly. You and I will talk things over later."

Bestowing on the major a smiling nod of acquiescence, which almost amounted to a benediction, Mr. Roxby once more resumed his post near Miss Matilda. He had received his cue, and knew now that it behoved him to take charge of Mrs. Paynter as soon as she should arrive.

Lizzie's entrance made rather a sensation. Not only was she a very striking woman anywhere, but her toilet, always in the extreme of fashion, was calculated to somewhat dazzle Islington in its magnificence. Mrs. Paynter piqued herself on

dressing from Paris direct. "Just a season ahead of London," she was wont to observe to her intimates. "You will all be wearing next year what I do this."

Whether she was right in such prophecy I can't say; but certain it was that Lizzie was always somewhat original in her dress, and, being gifted with excellent taste, never relapsed into the vulgarism of being *outré* as well as original. Mr. Roxby received her with easy assurance, and having presented her to Miss Matilda, — Aunt Clem being, by this, involved in a quadrille, — offered his arm for a tour of the rooms. Mrs. Paynter was gracious in the extreme, admired everything and everybody, and honestly thought the decorations very pretty. Still this was not precisely what Mrs. Paynter had come out to Islington to see, and her eyes rolled somewhat restlessly round in search of the mysterious Major Jenkens.

That worthy was by no means idle. He had marked her entrance, but purposely avoided her notice. No sooner had he seen her move off, under Roxby's escort, than he pounced upon Charlie Detfield, and proposed to find him partners. Though out of his element, Charlie was quite ready to plunge into the festivities of the occasion, and at once yielded to the solicitations of the major.

"Of course you won't mind going through a quadrille with one of the ladies of the house, to begin with?" suggested that astute veteran; "and then I'll find you metal more attractive. There are plenty of good-looking girls here to-night;" and, before Charlie had further time for reflection, he found himself standing up with Aunt Clem.

That satisfactorily arranged, the major hurried off in search of Mrs. Paynter. He found that lively lady already getting very tired of Mr. Roxby's ponderous conversation, and was greeted with a most gracious smile of recognition.

Dismissing her former escort with a slight bow, Mrs. Paynter took the major's arm, and without further preface said: —

"Of course I expected to meet you here to-night, and equally, of course, I expect to have this bride you have selected amongst you for Captain Detfield, pointed out to me."

"I feel honored by the confidence you repose in me," observed the major, "and have to thank you for bringing him."

"Enough, sir; now for the lady. It was quite as much to gratify my own curiosity as anything else that I interfered in your behalf. You owe me but little gratitude."

Lizzie felt a little angry with herself at having yielded to the persuasion of such an utter stranger; but the temptation of seeing this heiress with her own eyes had proved irresistible.

"If you will step into the next room, I can point her out to you at once," rejoined the major. "Captain Detfield is dancing with her now."

"And does he know that she is his intended bride?"

"Most certainly not, and I must throw myself upon your mercy not to divulge a hint of any such arrangement being in contemplation. It may probably all end in

nothing, and as the lady is as ignorant of the design as Captain Detfield, it is only fair to her to keep it a secret. I may rely upon your silence, may I not?"

"Let me see her," replied Lizzie, curtly.

As she spoke they entered the adjoining room, and Mrs. Paynter beheld Charlie gayly laughing and talking with Aunt Clem.

"And that is the lady?"

"That is Miss Stanbury," replied the major, diplomatically.

"Why, she's much too old for him! She's five-and-thirty if she's a day," rejoined Mrs. Paynter, sharply.

"You hardly do her justice, madam. Turned of thirty, say. But what would you have?—you can't have everything."

"But he is only six-and-twenty," murmured Lizzie; "and has contrived to accumulate any amount of debt in that period."

"What are four or five years between them?" exclaimed the major. "More especially when the lady brings as many thousands as years to the wedding."

"That may be; but that match will never take place."

"Probably not, if you exercise your influence to prevent it," rejoined the major, with considerable intention, and stealing a keen glance beneath his spectacles at his companion.

"I shall interfere neither for nor against it, sir," retorted Mrs. Paynter, haughtily. "Captain Detfield's matrimonial arrangements are nothing to me."

"But I may rely on your silence concerning such an idea?"

"Yes;" and now the quadrille being over, and Aunt Clem satisfactorily disposed of, Mrs. Paynter signalled Charlie with her fan, and prepared to indemnify herself for her researches on his behalf by a galop.

There is no denying that it is a very lively ball, with a swing and go in it that many a West-end dance might envy. As for Charlie, he has plunged into the whole thing *con amore*, and, though he has done a good deal of waltzing with Mrs. Paynter, has by no means restricted himself to one partner. The major has been very attentive to him in that respect, and he now finds himself whirling round the room with Bessie. The girl dearly loved dancing, and made no scruple about showing it. Detfield, as may be supposed, was a good performer, and could not help smiling at the frank manner in which she expressed her gratification. Faster and faster goes the music of that galop finale, only the most reckless dancers can keep pace with its flying time, when it suddenly ends with a tumultuous crash of brazen instruments, and the hot and thirsty guests troop downstairs to supper.

"There, Miss Stanbury, I think we shall do here," said Charlie, as he ensconced his partner in a snug corner behind the door of the supper-room. "The only thing that weighs upon my mind is, whether, as the young lady of the house, you are justified in submitting to so lowly a situation. Only say the word, though, and we will gain the head of the table, or perish in the attempt."

"Oh, no," laughed Bessie, "I am quite content as I am, and will leave such honor to my grave and reverend seniors."

"I quite agree with you. One's chicken and champagne is best consumed in shade and tranquillity. I always pity royalty, because quiet corners are things known to them only by hearsay."

"And you go to all the court balls, I suppose," inquired Bessie, who having discovered that her partner was a guardsman, looked upon him as moving with the *élite* of the land.

"I enjoy that privilege sometimes when on duty," replied Charlie, much amused.

"That is one of the sights I should like to see; but unfortunately there are so many things I want to see, and apparently may want to the end of the chapter."

"I don't think you need be despondent at your age," rejoined Detfield, laughing, "you've plenty of time before you."

"Oh, yes! and I'm not in the least despondent," replied Bessie, merrily. "I dare say I shall have lots of fun, if I never see half the things I want to. Next to riding I love dancing, and I shall manage to get my share of those two amusements, at all events."

"Do you ride often then?"

"Yes, nearly every day. There are plenty of pleasant rides out Hampstead way, and a good canter I do think beats a good valse."

"Don't you ever ride in the park?"

"Very seldom. I have no one to go with, and it is not nice riding there with only a groom. People look at you, as much as to ask who on earth you belong to. I tried it twice, but don't think I shall repeat the experiment."

"But isn't it rather dull work riding alone?"

"Oh dear, no! Velvet — that's my mare — and I get on capitally together. You see there is one advantage, I can go my own pace, — pelt along when I'm in spirits, or walk soberly when I want to think. Don't you look upon horseback as a famous place for reflection, Captain Detfield?"

"No, I can't say I do; but then you see my experiences are so different from yours. When I ride in town, it is usually with other people, and I am engaged in conversation. When I ride in the country, it is usually to hounds, and then all my energies are absorbed in beating somebody else, striving to make up for a bad start, wondering whether my horse will last another ten minutes, if it's a cracker, or some equally important problem. Ah! you may laugh, Miss Stanbury, but all the points I have mentioned are subjects of stupendous gravity to a man when hounds are running."

"No, nothing more, thank you," said Bessie, as Charlie offered to replenish her wine-glass. "I will ask you to take me upstairs now. I hear the music again."

Detfield complied, and begged for another dance when they regained the ball-room. The band was playing that very Valse de Fascination which Bessie had declared she really must try that afternoon when the idea of the ball was first mooted. Without giving her time to consult her card, Charlie whirled his fair companion into the midst of the throng. That first after-supper valse is always the cream of the

evening to those who really love dancing, and the guardsman, perhaps, enjoyed it almost as much as his partner. But Bessie was speedily claimed when the music ceased, and, as Detfield lounged leisurely to a seat, he met Mrs Paynter.

"I don't want to crush such a promising flirtation as you seem to have established with that pretty little thing in forget-me-nots and rose-buds!" exclaimed Lizzie, laughing; "but if you are disengaged for a few minutes I'll get you to find John, and tell him I am ready to go. We'll take you or not, just as you please."

"I am quite at your orders, and we'll be off as soon as I can find the brougham."

That and Mr. Paynter were quickly discovered, and a few minutes more saw the trio speeding rapidly westward, immersed in their own reflections.

"Charlie will never be brought to marry that Miss Stanbury," mused Mrs. Paynter.

"Rather nice, that little Stanbury girl," reflected Charlie.

"What a confounded nuisance all balls and evening parties are!" thought Mr. Paynter, in his semi-moments of consciousness. But the gods were merciful to him, poor man, in the main, and he slept peacefully for the most part during the homeward drive. Talk of peas in the shoes, what is that to the purgatory of tight boots, and extreme boredom, to the man who is craving for a smoking-jacket, slippers, and a cigar? Verily, matrimony hath its burdens, and escorting the wife of one's bosom into society that pleasureth us not is, by no means, one of the lightest.

But, while Mrs. Paynter's brougham rattles gayly over the stones of the Euston road, while the band pours out its most spirit-stirring melodies, two gentlemen are engaged in earnest conference in the well-nigh deserted supper-room.

"I have put the whole thing fairly in train," observed the major, helping himself to a glass of champagne; "all I ask is that you don't interfere, but let me pull the strings. The number of marriages that come to nothing annually, because one or other, or both, of the innocent victims suddenly discover that they are being thrown together with intention, is inconceivable."

"My dear major, I have the most perfect reliance on your tact and discretion," replied Roxby, in unctuous tones. "What Claxby Jenkens undertakes to do every one knows is as good as done."

"Hum! what Claxby Jenkens undertakes to do, my friend, has generally some reference to his own interest. Let us waste no time beating about the bush, but come to the point at once. What benefit am I to derive from this match?"

"The gratification, my dear friend, of having promoted the union of two young people in every way suitable. I might go further and say, formed, made for one another," replied Roxby, benignantly.

The major grinned. The plausible scoundrel with whom he was conversing, he knew, even to a confederate, never altogether dropped the hypocritical veil with which he was wont to gloss over his villanies.

"And what else?" he inquired at length.

"My dear Jenkens," returned the other, "my interest in my charming ward is so great that I would give five hundred pounds to see her happily married."

"Lodged to my account at Herries & Co.'s, the day before the wedding," said the major, laconically.

"Dear, dear, you will have your joke," responded Mr. Roxby, as he nodded assent.

The major knew his man, and knew that the bargain was concluded between them, as well as if it had been couched in more direct language. But he wanted to know more.

"And you, what are you to get out of this affair?" he continued, looking his companion steadily in the face.

"A release from my trust in great measure, and the approval of my own conscience," replied the other, with a low laugh. "Another glass of wine, my dear friend. Here's the health of the young couple."

"That is no answer to my question," said the major, doggedly.

"If you won't be satisfied with that, I can't help it. But, hark you!" continued Mr. Roxby, with a sudden change of tone; "there are plenty of young men in the world, besides Captain Detfield, who would be glad to take a pretty girl, with a good fortune, to wife, and there are plenty of other people, besides Claxby Jenkens, who might be induced to lend me a hand in finding her a husband. You are clever, and, therefore, I make choice of you; but, my dear major, if I find you *too* clever, I shall call in somebody else; have fresh advice, as the doctors say."

"And suppose I tell what I know?" replied the major, fiercely. "Suppose I make public that you wish to make capital of your ward's hand?"

"I couldn't entertain such an absurd supposition for a moment," rejoined Mr. Roxby, once more relapsing into his usually bland moment. "Ripping up old stories is always bad taste; and what you and I might say to each other's discredit would be pretty equally balanced. No, my friend, you'll not do that when you think over it. You'll do your utmost to promote this marriage, I'm sure; and nobody possesses such tact and finesse for carrying out a delicate arrangement of the kind as my friend, Claxby Jenkens. But it is dry work talking,—let's have another glass of wine. No more, eh? Then let us go upstairs."

As the major drove home to his lodgings, he ruminated much over the events of the evening. He did not feel so certain of having the best of Mr. Roxby as he had done, when thinking over the affair in John street. That pull over his neighbor, such a desideratum in the major's eyes, was not to be obtained in this case apparently. Still the douceur was handsome, and the first act of the comedy had been most successfully brought about.

"I should like to know though," muttered the major, "what Roxby expects to get out of this, and how he means to get it."

CHAPTER XIV.

WILL YOU GIVE ME YOURSELF?

To suppose that Cissy Hemsworth is blind to Gore's admiration for herself would be absurd, — a woman is never blind to that; a foolish woman will sometimes fall into the opposite extreme, and rate a man's *at*tentions higher than his *in*tentions concerning her, but she rarely makes the mistake of overlooking the effect of her attractions on the male sex. She knows by instinct when she has achieved a success of that nature. But Cissy was very far from guessing what wild work her charms had wrought in the barrister's heart. She little dreamed of the passion that he had conceived for her.

Reticent by nature, reticent from professional training, Gore had so far succeeded in masking the tumult that filled his veins from her notice. If Cissy thought that he admired her, she certainly had never thought that he was likely to ask her to marry him. Indeed, considering that she openly avowed that it was a necessity for her to marry, it was surprising how very little reflection she gave concerning it. Her perfect *nonchalance* on this point was a source of perpetual astonishment to Mrs. Paynter. That energetic lady could not understand it. Cissy would refuse her invitations, even when she came to Hanover street herself with them, and declared that she had "some one who would be just the thing," coming to dinner.

"I can't help you, my dear, if you won't help yourself," cried Mrs. Paynter, wrathfully, on one of these occasions. "What is the use of my parading all the eligible men I can lay hands on, if you won't come and meet them?"

To which Cissy replied: —

"Don't be angry, but I really do not feel up to going out to-day."

"Well," mused Mrs. Paynter, as she took her departure, under the circumstances above mentioned, "I don't see what's to become of her, unless she pronounces herself ill, and then makes *les beaux yeaux* at her doctor; how she is to arrive at a husband is quite beyond me. I would do my best for her if she would but let me, but she won't; and she is so nice, and so attractive, that she might really do well if there's any taste left in mankind. Mercenary wretches!" continued Mrs. Paynter, with a solemn shake of her pretty head, "they always mix up matrimony with money nowadays. Dear old John didn't, though, when he took me, precious bargain as I have been to him;" and a soft smile suffused her face, such as not one of her many admirers had ever won from her, plead as they might.

Montague Gore, still trying to disentangle that question of the settlement, for the second time has it pointed out to him that there is a family of Hemsworths settled in Nottinghamshire. Information this from the chief constable of that county. It is curious, he was told the same quite incidentally at a dinner-party at which he happened

to mention his quest in the very first stage of his inquiries. He made that trip down to Nottingham at the time of the Goose Fair, on purpose to investigate that statement, and he found that there had been Hemsworths in the neighborhood, but were none now.

It was odd, he had sent round a circular to all the chief constables in England, requesting information on the subject; and, save from Nottingham, reply there was none. Now it was not to be supposed that Hemsworths grew only in Nottinghamshire.

Gore knew this fact well. Take the most uncommon English name you will, and you shall discover it in three or four different counties in England. Pick out any name, as striking you as peculiar, that you have never heard before, keep that name in your mind, and it is astonishing how often you will meet it in the next two years. He thought it singular that the only county from which he received a reply should be the only county in which he had ascertained there were no Hemsworths. True, he admitted that his search had been but hurried and cursory. He had felt too little reliance on the accuracy of his information to waste much time upon it. As a barrister, he should have known better. The major would never have made such a mistake. In pursuing an investigation of this nature, information can only be classified under two heads, — reliable or unreliable. If deemed the former, too much pains cannot be taken to sift it thoroughly; if the latter, put it away completely at once. Half measures are useless. Gore was too clever a man not to know this, but the fact was he had interested himself in lukewarm fashion in the search to start with. Now it was different; he was working in Cissy's behalf with all the keenness and perseverance of a bloodhound. He thinks it necessary to go and see her upon the point. "She may remember some allusion of her late husband's to that county," argues Gore, speciously, to himself.

When a man of mature age falls in love injudiciously, however much he may ponder over his imprudence, he is more likely to end in matrimony than if he were still young. Ways and means is a question that sometimes curbs youthful passion, but a man in his prime has generally achieved an income of some sort, which may enable him to carry the affair to a conclusion. In Gore's case it was decidedly so. He was of inexpensive habits, and making a large yearly income in his profession.

The idea of marriage had seldom crossed his brain since the terrible catastrophe that had ruined his life. When it had, it was to marriage of the most conventional kind that he had looked forward. Now, he knew well that he had cast that idea to the winds. He would fain wed a penniless bride, of whose antecedents he could learn nothing, a woman of no family; fortunate, indeed, if she proved literally of no family, and that relations of the most inconvenient description should not discover themselves afterwards. Then, again, he was by no means certain that Cissy would say him yes, should he put his fortune to the test. Though she avowed her intention to marry, though he knew that her circumstances made it almost imperative on her to accept the first eligible offer she should receive, still there was that about her which made him uncertain as to whether she might not say no to him. Cissy he could but own

was something of an enigma. A woman likely to face desperate straits with the stoicism of an Indian, or to succumb with the passionate despair of a child. He could not make up his mind about her. He would have been in no way surprised at her taking the failure of her scanty resources in either light. Her quiet confidence that something would turn up in her favor amazed him as much as it did Mrs. Paynter. What could she count on?

Such reflections brought Montague Gore to Hanover street. As his hostess received him with her usual frank manner, Gore thought she never looked so handsome. Her bright face flashed and sparkled as he began to tell of this fresh information, and she murmured:—

"How kind you are to take so much trouble in my behalf!"

As he continued, she listened with evident interest; but when he mentioned Nottinghamshire as the probable county from which her husband sprung, she gave an unconcealed start of surprise. From that moment, she listened in an anxious and yet preoccupied manner that it was impossible should escape his notice; interested, evidently, to hear what he had to tell, and yet at the same time haunted with memories of bygone years.

"Do you know anything of Nottinghamshire yourself?" inquired Gore, in conclusion.

Cissy hesitated, and appeared troubled for a moment, as if thinking how she should frame her reply.

"I am sorry," she said, at length, "but I can give you no answer to that question. It seems so ungrateful, too, after all the trouble you have been taking; and it grieves me dreadfully you should think me that. Why, oh why," she continued, passionately, "do you not give my affairs up? You have been so very kind to me; and yet, when you are doing your best, I have to refuse you information which, though slight and of little account, you have a right to demand."

It was the first time he had ever seen Cissy moved, and it made his pulses tingle. The sight of emotion in the woman we love is wont to occasion tumult in the system.

"I am only too glad to be of assistance to you," he replied, in constrained tones. "If I ask for information on subjects painful to you to refer to, believe me it is from no idle curiosity, but simply because I think it would be useful."

"Yes, I know it," interposed Cissy, hurriedly. "I should be mad to think otherwise. But I have given my word, as I told you before, to keep silence on this past life of mine, and I will abide by that pledge. Don't, pray, think that there is anything I have cause to conceal. If the poor history of my childhood were published at Charing Cross, to-morrow, there is nothing I should feel cause to blush for."

She had spoken with much earnestness, and the color came into her cheeks as she finished. She knew this man admired her. She knew that he had taken infinite pains and trouble in her behalf. She was thinking no whit of him as a husband or lover, but she was anxious to justify herself in his eyes as far as she might. She felt that this reticence concerning her early days told against her, was liable to be miscon-

strued, and she wished that Montague Gore should think well of her. She had so few friends that she could not afford to lose one lightly, and if she had no love, yet Cissy had great esteem for her adviser.

His reply came at last in low tones, swift and steady: —

"It is a pity that you should have made such a promise; but I will not urge you to break it. I entertain no doubt, whatever, that there is nothing in your past would shame you to speak of. One thing I may say. Do you think the person to whom you made that pledge would not absolve you from it now? The circumstances in which you stand could never have been contemplated, and I am only stating my honest conviction, when I say that the clue I seek will be probably found, if it exist, in some trivial incident of the past life of yourself or your husband."

"I cannot see that. What could you hope to discover from my early days?" interposed Cissy.

"Simply this; if I knew with whom you lived and associated in England, I should very likely get a hint as to who were likely to be trustees to any marriage settlement you might have, — very probably discover your father."

"That is a conclusive reason for giving you no information on the subject," cried Cissy, quickly.

"As I thought," murmured Gore to himself. "It is to that father she has pledged her silence. I wonder what his object was in exacting that promise?" and then he could not help further reflecting that a father with private reasons for courting obscurity was not calculated to make Cissy more eligible as a wife.

"There is no more to be said, then," he replied, at length. "I must work out this affair as best I can.

"Yes, there is more to be said," exclaimed Cissy, with animation. "I have to thank you yet again, for devoting so much of your time to assisting a woman who must appear to be throwing all the impediments she can in your way. I can't help it. I counsel you to give it up. But, believe me, when I say I am truly grateful for all you have endeavored to do for me."

"I shall not give it up. Keep your gratitude, Mrs. Hemsworth, until I succeed; I may perchance test it then. It is contrary to all rule, I know, and yet I might even ask some recompense at your hands, should I fail;" and he rose as he spoke, and stood facing her.

"From me!" said Cissy, looking up at him. "I don't know what you could ask from me, I have so little to give."

"You have that to give which any man would prize," returned Gore, in low, earnest tones, his passion completely overmastering him. "You know what I would ask. There is no need to tell you that I love you. You must have known it these weeks past. Cissy, will you give me yourself? Can you trust me to take care of you for the rest of your life?"

She was a little astonished. She had not expected this, although conscious of his

admiration. She had never taken into consideration that he might ask her to marry him. She liked him very much, but she was not the least in love with him.

"You have taken me by surprise," she said, slowly. "You offer me love instead of friendship. Are you sure that it is not pity for my loneliness makes you speak thus?"

"I know that the hope of calling you my wife is the dearest wish of my heart at this moment!" he retorted, passionately. "Cissy, can you love me?"

For a few seconds her face was troubled. Then she replied: —

"You won't be angry, you won't think badly of me if I tell you the truth. I wish to answer you honestly, and yet I do not wish to be unkind." She paused here, and toyed nervously with her rings.

"And my answer!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "Can you love me?"

"I don't know. Stay!" she exclaimed, extending her hand to him. "Don't quarrel with me, don't be angry with me because I tell you the truth. I do not love you — I have never loved any man. No man has ever been such a friend to me as you; but when you ask me if I can love you, I can only reply, I don't know."

He was holding her hands in his as she spoke, and when she finished, he bent down over her and said: —

"I will put my request in other words. Will you marry me?" and then he released her hands, and stood silently awaiting her reply.

She bowed her head for a few seconds, then, raising it, looked frankly but steadfastly up into his face, and said quietly: —

"Yes, if you wish it."

"My darling," he replied, "I will be content with that for the present. It will be my business henceforth to teach you to love me."

Cissy smiled.

"I don't know," she said, "whether I possess such a faculty. I like you and esteem you very much. If you are willing to take me, I will marry you; but I warn you, I cannot simulate what I do not feel. Friendship I can promise, — true and thorough friendship; but love, I do not know whether I am capable of such a feeling. My ideal is so very different from what I have seen termed such, that perhaps it is beyond my comprehension. I am always considered stupid, you know."

"You are quite wise enough for me," replied Gore, in jubilant tones, "and they who deem you otherwise are those who cannot read aright."

Half an hour afterwards, and Gore, having made his adieux, has once more gained the street. He walks with head erect and sparkling eye, as men do who have sped well in a love-suit. To have won assent to our wooing sufficeth most of us for the time. Whether our passion be prudent, whether the woman we have asked to tread life's path with us is likely to be approved of in our maturer judgment, we reck little. She is the one woman in the world, as far as we are concerned just now; and has she not pledged herself to be so always?

The plunge is over, and there can be no further debate about the wisdom of marry-

ing Cissy Hemsworth. The word spoken never comes back, saith the proverb; and Montague Gore is light of heart as he thinks that Cissy is his plighted wife. True, she has told him that she does not love him. What of that? It was scarce likely that he could have won her love on so short an acquaintance. That would come. Let her but once be his wife, and he had no fear of gaining her affections.

As if it is in the power of woman to bestow her affections exactly where she will. A woman who marries without giving her love is like one who sails on a long voyage with no anchor on board. It may be prosperous, the winds fair, and the anchor never required. But should the winds prove contrary, should treacherous currents sweep silently but swiftly towards the breakers, then they must anchor or be wrecked. When they have nothing to hold to in their extremity, God help them!

CHAPTER XV.

A SOCIAL OBLIGATION.

MRS. PAYNTER sits dawdling in her drawing-room, the morning after the dance at Roseneath House, in that somewhat *distrait* manner we are wont to wear when a solitary breakfast has succeeded to our night's dissipation. Her husband has departed as usual to his business, and Lizzie is musing upon the matrimonial scheme that has been confided to her. That men marry for money nobody knows better than Mrs. Paynter; but she cannot think Charlie will harden his heart, and take that Miss Stanbury to wife in spite of all the money he is to get with her. A passable-looking woman enough, thinks Mrs. Paynter, but old enough to be his mother. Judging poor Miss Clementina rather hardly this, for that lady is by no means so advanced in years as that comes to.

"Well," thought Mrs. Paynter, "if it is for his good, let it be so. I'll interfere about it neither way. I don't think I shall ever feel jealous of Miss Stanbury, which is a consolation. And if that odious major is right, I'm like to lose an admirer in any case,—whether it be by matrimony, or the effects of money troubles. Poor Charlie! I am very sorry for him, but that he was on the verge of a crash I have suspected for some time. The nicest people always are so unfortunate; nobody ever dies opportunely and bequeaths them handsome legacies. It is the detestable folks one is always meeting and wishing one didn't that grow rich by inheritance. Look at that little wretch, Edward Bunbury, for instance, who exacts the very last yard from a cabman, and then gets out and walks to save the extra sixpence. He's as rich as Crœsus already, with no idea of how to spend what he has; yet a venerable aunt betook herself off the other day, and left him I don't know how many more thousands. There is something very wrong in our social arrangements," muttered Mrs. Paynter, gravely; "though I don't know that I ought to grumble. At all events, when we

get our rights, whatever they may be, I don't mean to vote for a new distribution of property."

Here her meditations were cut short by the opening of the door, and the announcement of Mrs. Hemsworth.

"Delighted to see you Cissy, dear," exclaimed Mrs. Paynter, as she rose to welcome her guest. "I am 'all in the downs' this morning, as men say, when they have remained up over night longer than is good for them. You will brighten me up, and have come to pass the day, I hope. Selfish, of me, very, I know; but I plead guilty to always entrapping pleasant people when I have a chance."

"Yes, I have come for a long talk," rejoined Cissy, as she sank quietly into an easy-chair. "To begin with, I have something to tell you."

"Nothing disagreeable, I trust," said Mrs. Paynter, quickly. "I don't feel equal to bad news this morning."

"No," replied Cissy, with a low, rippling laugh. "It's not bad news, and it's not at all disagreeable. Likely to turn out very much the reverse, I hope. I am going to be married."

"You are! I am so glad; but who to?" cried Mrs. Paynter, breathlessly.

"Mr. Montague Gore. He asked me yesterday, and I said yes."

"Montague Gore! My dear, I congratulate you with all my heart; but how did it come about? I had no idea you had seen much of him lately."

Mrs. Paynter, quick as she was about such things generally, might well be blind to this. She had no knowledge of the barrister's constant visits to Hanover street. She had only encountered him there twice, and then with a long interval between. Cissy rarely mentioned his name, and then only as her professional adviser regarding some property it was thought she might be entitled to in England.

Mrs. Hemsworth colored slightly as she answered:—

"I have seen him a good deal lately, on that business I told you of, and though I knew he admired me, yet I never thought of his wishing to marry me till yesterday. But I like him very much, and I am so entirely alone that I can only be grateful to him for undertaking the care of me. Don't laugh, please; but," continued Cissy, with a slight sob, "if you had ever known what it was to stand so utterly alone as I have done the last few months, you would understand what a relief it is to have some one you have a right to lean upon."

"I do understand perfectly," replied Mrs. Paynter, gravely, "and I have often been troubled about your future, Cissy. But I think we need fret about that no more. Montague can well afford to take care of a wife, is a most agreeable man, and I have no doubt will make you an excellent husband. Why," continued Mrs. Paynter, recovering herself, "he was one of the first eligibles I paraded for you, if you remember; but I must say, of late, I thought nothing would come of it. Why, you'll be a rich woman again, Cissy. Your betrothed is making no end of money in his profession."

"Shall I?" replied Mrs. Hemsworth, simply; "I am glad of that, for I don't think

I should be a good wife to a poor man; but I can't say I ever gave his income a thought, when I agreed to marry him yesterday."

"What, are you so much in love with him that you could think of nothing else?" rejoined Mrs Paynter, laughing.

"I am not in love with him the least, and told him so; but he offered to take care of me, and I thought I could trust him."

Mrs. Paynter eyed her guest narrowly. That a woman of the world—as Cissy Hemsworth, from her past life, could not possibly help being—had accepted a husband without considering whether he had an income to support her, was a little beyond that lady's power of believing. Either Cissy was playing the *rôle* of the *ingénue* with a vengeance, or was a simpleton past all understanding.

"You told him you didn't love him?" said Lizzie at last, speaking very slowly, and almost dropping out her words. "I think I would have left that out if I'd been you. And you'd no idea whether he was rich or poor?"

"I told him the truth. It is best so. He has been too true a friend not to deserve that much at my hands. I never thought about his income. I supposed, as he had asked me to marry him, that he had enough for us to live upon. No one can know better than he that I have nothing."

Mrs. Paynter could not understand this at all. She was morally incapable of understanding such a character as Cissy's. It was not that her disposition was false, but it was soft. Driven to bay, and Lizzie would have displayed plenty of hardihood; but she detested unpleasantness, she always glossed over disagreeable facts. She would not actually lie, but she would undoubtedly distort circumstances that she deemed might be unpalatable to her hearers. When she confessed her sins to her husband, which she never did till necessity compelled, it was only by hint and innuendo extending over two or three days, mingled with penitent self-accusation, in a queer, bewitching fashion all her own. To tell an admirer that she didn't care about him would have seemed to Lizzie needless brutality.

"He can't help it, you know," she would say, with the most perfect *naïveté*; "so why ill-treat him?" But to tell the man that you were about to marry that you didn't love him, was in her eyes extremely foolish. It had a savage candor about it, repugnant to Lizzie's caressing nature. There was a vein of truthfulness and chivalry in Mrs. Hemsworth that she could hardly understand. Lizzie would stand by her friends stanchly enough in difficulties, but it must be in her own indirect fashion. She had hardly moral fibre sufficient to face the world boldly in their behalf. With all her audacity and Bohemianism, Mrs. Paynter did respect the world's opinion. She rather liked astonishing society, nay, even shocking it in her proceedings; but she was specially careful not to go too far. Flirt she would, flirt she did, but she contrived to avoid that scandal should thoroughly fasten on her. She might be talked about; but she took heed that no sentence of ostracism should be promulgated concerning her, though her passion for intrigue had more than once led her into grievous difficulties.

Whether Cissy is deep past all conception, or innocent to an extent unheard of, puzzles Mrs. Paynter not a little, as she asks quietly, "And when is the wedding to take place?"

"Very soon," replied the widow, shading her fair face from the firelight. "Montague wishes it should be so, and I think, too, it would be best. I am weary of fighting the world alone, and there is no reason for delay, unless he sees such. You will, perhaps, think I ought not to marry before my year's widowhood is out; but then I am peculiarly situated, remember."

"I think you have no one to take care of you at present, and the sooner you have the better," replied Mrs. Paynter, promptly. "But here is luncheon; come along, Cissy, and get something to eat, and give me the opportunity of drinking your health."

When Mrs. Paynter, at dinner, confided to her husband the information she had received, that gentleman received it with much astonishment.

"I never thought Gore would ever marry," he said; "and, if he did, I should have thought Mrs. Hemsworth the last person he would have chosen for a wife. I have nothing to say against your friend, Lizzie,—she's charming; but I don't think she's suited to him. Of course, it's a good thing for her, and I hope it will turn out happily. But—"

"None of your buts, sir," replied his wife. "Of course it will turn out well. Why shouldn't it, I should like to know?"

"Well, I've an idea that Mrs. Hemsworth has no conception about managing a house, except in rather princely fashion. Gore is making a good income, no doubt; but one that a woman with extravagant views, like yourself, for instance, could soon knock holes in."

"I am sure I've been very good lately," retorted Lizzie, resenting the hit at herself with great promptitude. "I haven't come to you for extra money this quarter."

"My telling you it wasn't to be had may have something to do with that," rejoined her husband, laughing. "However, never mind, I am very likely all wrong, and no one can wish them happiness more sincerely than I do."

"They will do very well, you will see; but, John dear, you know this will cause considerable expense to *me*, and therefore I shall have to come to you before long."

"Why, what on earth has Cissy Hemsworth's wedding to do with your expenses?" inquired John Paynter, brusquely. He was a most indulgent and liberal husband; but Lizzie sometimes tried him hard on this point. No matter what amount her purse was furnished with, Mrs. Paynter was one of those women who are always in difficulties about money matters.

"Why, you dear old goose, don't you see I must have a new dress for the wedding? And then, of course, I must make Cissy a wedding present, and you wouldn't like me to do that shabbily, I am sure."

"O Lord!" returned John Paynter, "I didn't know, when I wished her happi-

ness, that I was to pay for it, besides. I shall preach celibacy to all our friends, out of due regard for my own pocket, in future. But you shall have something to buy them a present with, little woman; and, you're right, I should like it to be good. As for a dress,—ridiculous; you've plenty. Go in any of them. I'll find no money for that."

"But you must," cried Lizzie, laughing. "Your wife attend her friend's wedding in an old gown? My dear John, you'd be hooted out of all society. It would come under the head of cruelty, and entitle me to separate maintenance, at the very least, sir."

"Ah! you'd find separate maintenance difficult to get along on, Lizzie, however high it were rated. But I'm froze for a cigar. If you're not going out to-night, let's have coffee in the smoking-room."

Mrs. Paynter smiled assent. When she received special invitation to that sanctuary, she knew her ends were achieved.

CHAPTER XVI.

A QUIET WEDDING.

At last the major has received the intelligence so anxiously awaited these weeks past. His Parisian correspondent, M. Rayner, was a man not easily baffled; but he was utterly nonplussed in the first instance. He had expected little trouble in ascertaining Mrs. Hemsworth's London address. Some of her friends were doubtless acquainted with it,—probably corresponded with her. But when he came to make inquiries, it appeared that none, even of those she was supposed to be most intimate with, were even aware that she had left for England. Some would have it that she was still in Paris; others that she had taken a small house at Versailles. In short, he already knew more than any one else concerning her. It piqued him. He was a man who prided himself on never being beat about the unravelling of a mystery. Still, this certainly did seem a hard nut to crack, that his old friend Jenkens had given him,—to ascertain the whereabouts of a woman in London, from inquiries prosecuted in Paris. M. Rayner ruminated a good deal over this problem.

One evening, while smoking his cigar, sipping his coffee, and musing over it for at least the hundredth time, he had an inspiration,—one of those flashes that constitute high detective art, or acute analysis of character. Mrs. Hemsworth, he argued, was rather celebrated for her *succès de toilette*. A woman who has achieved fame in that respect will never abandon the foible of being well-dressed. A Parisian will never be satisfied with an English modiste; sooner or later she will send to the artiste she employed here. There is only to discover that artiste, which is simple, and, *pouf*, it is a question of time.

To discover the modiste that the fashionable Madame Hemsworth had employed was, of course, a very easy matter. Some weeks elapsed, and then a note from the lady in question informs Mr. Rayner that she has received an order from her old customer, and that when completed it is to be forwarded to No. — Hanover street, Hanover square, London, W. M. Rayner sends off this information to Major Jenkens in his airy, swaggering manner.

"Anything more that I can do for you, *mon cher*, major?" he asks; "the amateur detective is a favorite *rôle* of mine; command me, if you seek knowledge about any one. I will back myself to ascertain anything for you, with this exception, namely, how many weeks our present government will last, and who will succeed M. le Maréchal."

The major smiles as he peruses this letter. It astonishes the veteran intriguer little to find that the lady he sought is living within a mile of his offices. His experience teaches him that the clue to most information you require is usually very close to your hand, if you did but know where to look for it. Curious that Montague Gore, also seeking information, should be similarly impressed with the idea that the key to his mystery of "the settlement" is not far off, though he has no conception of its whereabouts. Then, again, the major always had held that Cissy was in London, and, that being the case, there was nothing surprising about the locality in which he found her.

Claxby Jenkens is very busy about the little pigeon-holes in his desk this morning. He unties more than one neatly docketed little packet, reads, and ponders over its contents. There are one or two things not working altogether to the major's satisfaction. That his dear friend Roxby is so utterly beyond his control troubles him not a little. He had so made up his mind to have just a trifle the best of him upon this occasion, and behold the crafty Roxby seems less within his grip than ever; has given him, indeed, pretty frankly to understand that, unless he submits to play the subordinate part assigned to him in this matrimonial speculation, his services will be dispensed with. To a man like the major, accustomed to be the prime mover in all such mysterious transactions as he may engage in, this itself is galling. We do not like to descend to Cassius after having been wont to play Iago. The major is as thoroughly addicted to intrigue as Mrs. Paynter to flirtation. It is open to question whether a hundred pounds acquired by legitimate means would have had the same value in his eyes as a less sum obtained by very dubious finesse. The major was at heart a social marauder, and despised the legitimate trader with all the scorn of the buccaneers of days lang syne.

Another thing that moves his wrath is that one of his puppets in this approaching drama shows signs of much contumacy. Charlie Detfield has written a curt refusal to dine with Mr. Roxby, — a dinner designed by the conspirators to throw him once more across Bessie Stanbury; and that a man so entirely in the hands of his creditors should presume to thwart their endeavors to obtain their own again is most grievous insubordination in the major's eyes.

"I take measures for the young sinner's relief, and he has the audacity to throw obstacles in the way," murmurs the major, softly. "It is always the case whenever you try to do good to your fellow-creatures; they always meet your exertions with the grossest ingratitude. Our pauper population are never satisfied with those institutions which a paternal government has organized for their reception, turn up their noses at the porridge provided for them, and make outcry at being separated from the wives of their bosom; and here is an aristocratic pauper showing equal ingratitude, refusing the baked meats we would serve up to him, and declining to take a wife to his bosom. Does he think property is acquired without some incumbrances? To be sure he is not altogether in the secret as yet. I have been fool enough to trust to nature as a confederate; as if people ever did fall in love, where it was clearly their duty to do so. No, I'll have recourse to human agency again. Nature is a preposterous imposition, that requires to be curbed, that stimulates people to all kinds of imprudences, that rarely suggests scientific selection in marriage, and may be generally considered as an antediluvian humbug. Nature, in Detfield's case, has apparently suggested getting your living by bills. Captain Detfield, it is time you were made to feel the bit a little. I shall just drop Simmonds a line to hint that he had best press for a settlement."

That little transaction neatly executed in the major's clear, precise caligraphy, and that gentleman, after some further reference to his pigeon-holes, thinks he will walk up to Hanover street, and make a few inquiries concerning Mrs. Hemsworth; see her, perhaps, if it seems judicious; will be guided a little by circumstances on that point, thinks the major.

A few final directions to his clerk, and then the major carefully adjusts his hat, draws on his gloves, grasps a good, serviceable umbrella, and sallies forth, — a well-preserved, middle-aged gentleman, of military bearing, but yet with a dash of the city about him; chairman or director of half-a-dozen companies now, you would not be surprised to hear, though an officer in Her Majesty's service in his younger days. Head erect, glaring sternly through his spectacles, and handling his umbrella as if it usurped the place of the accustomed bamboo, the major strides up Regent street. It is not often that he leaves that web of his in John street, where, like a dropsical spider, he sits awaiting the flies, so early; but he has his reasons. He is interested concerning Mrs. Hemsworth, and wishes to know as much about her as he can. St. Martin's Church clanged half-past eleven as he went past the portico; and, though the major's gait has a touch of military deliberation, yet there is grafted on it the city man's restless activity. Claxby Jenkens combined swiftness and dignity in his footsteps, and was not long before he turned into Hanover street, and knocked at No. —, with that imposing air of authority habitual to him.

There was considerable delay in responding to his summons. In fact the major had appealed to the knocker in still more authoritative fashion more than once, before the door was opened by a young woman, in a state of fluster, giggle, and white rosettes, who exclaimed, upon seeing him: —

"Beg pardon, sir, but I was so busy I didn't hear you before."

"Mrs. Hemsworth lives here, I believe?" inquired the major.

"Yes, sir; at least, that is to say — I mean, of course she does," replied the waiting-maid, with further accession of giggle, accompanied by confusion.

"Is she at home?"

But this interrogation seemed altogether too much for the damsel; and it was only with much smirking and blushing that she blurted forth at length: —

"La, sir! don't you know? She's gone to St. George's."

"St. George's!" replied the major, blankly. "St. George's what — hospital? What the deuce do you mean?"

"No, sir; oh, dear, no!" and here the young lady's risible faculties were so exquisitely tickled at the idea of the hospital, that she was unable to make further response.

"Confound the girl!" muttered the major to himself. "When will the grinning idiot stop laughing? Excuse me," he said, blandly, "I have not met Mrs. Hemsworth for many years. Where is she gone?"

"I beg pardon, sir, but it did sound so absurd. Hospital! Oh, dear, I thought you were joking. Missus has gone to St. George's Church. She's being married this morning."

"How long has she been gone?" asked the major, sharply.

"About ten minutes, sir."

Claxby Jenkens twisted sharp on his heel, without another word, and made the best of his way to St. George's. He entered the church, and walked quietly up the aisle. He could see there was a group in front of the altar as he did so. When he came near, he stepped into a pew and gazed attentively at the scene before him. Clad in rich white silk, and bonnet to match, he recognized Cissy Hemsworth at once. A little behind her stood Mrs. Paynter. Of the half-score people present, these were all he recognized.

The officiating clergyman was in the middle of the marriage service. The major listened to it at first somewhat lazily. He had never thought of this. But he leaned forward eagerly as there smote upon his ears the words: —

"Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance, in the holy estate of matrimony?" and heard Cissy reply in clear, resolute tones, "I will."

A few seconds more, and he heard the bridegroom recite in dull, monotonous fashion: —

"I, Montague, take thee, Cecilia, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, etc."

"Montague!" muttered the major, "I shall remember that name, I think; but still it is well to be business like;" and, producing a memorandum-book, he made a brief entry of the marriage, names, date, etc. That done, and he watched the conclusion

of the ceremony with the cool, critical eye of a connoisseur; did such recognition to Mrs. Paynter's tasteful toilet as would have much gratified that rather mortified lady, had she but known it. For Lizzie was really quite put out at the exceeding quietness of the wedding.

"When she said it was to be a very quiet affair," whispered Mrs. Paynter to her husband, "I could not possibly understand that it was to be clandestine, you know. It is ridiculous their getting married as if they were ashamed of it. I wonder they didn't go to a registry office."

"Yes, it is a pity that we weren't better informed. You might have saved the expense of that new dress, for instance," retorted Mr. Paynter, with a quaint twinkle in his eyes.

"Oh, a good dress is never thrown away," rejoined his wife, smiling. "Of course, it's a disappointment that there is no one to see its *début*, but it will come in useful."

Gore had pleaded for no fuss, and Cissy had wisely replied that she, too, wished a quiet wedding, albeit she felt it incumbent to send to Madame Helders of the Rue de la Paix, Paris, for her wedding-robes, due to which circumstance was Major Jenkens' attendance at her bridal.

The benediction is spoken, the registry signed, and Cissy having received the congratulations of the Paynters, Fox Brine, and the half-dozen other people who had been present at the ceremony, walks down the aisle leaning on her husband's arm. A rather solemn breakfast in Hanover street, and then a carriage bears away the newly married couple *en route* for Brighton. One of the wedding party lingered behind in the church, — it was the unbidden major. No sooner had the remainder crossed the door-sill, than issuing from his pew he made his way rapidly to the vestry. The clergyman was already gone, but the clerk still lingered and willingly allowed him to inspect the register.

"Montague Gore, Hare Court, Temple," said the major, as he once more had recourse to his memorandum-book. "Oh, well, there will be very little difficulty, I imagine, in finding out all about him; but this marriage may make a considerable difference in my plans; I must think — I must inquire. I would have given a thousand pounds to have known of this a month ago."

CHAPTER XVII.

ON A BICYCLE.

It took Roseneath House almost a week to settle down after that momentous event, — the ball. When your lot is cast where the stream runs strong, and you are perpetually battling with the waters, you can form no conception how little will create a turmoil in the still pools of existence. As Aunt Clem said, "after the last wreath,

the last sconce had been removed from the walls, the house still savored of dissipation." The maids, too, seemed bitten with the "Valse de Fascination," and hummed it over their daily labors in a manner that scandalized a domestic martinet like Miss Matilda grossly. The knocker also seemed "always on the rap," as the same lady remarked, "What with people fetching away things I had no idea we had ever borrowed, and receiving calls and cards from people I never heard of before, a nap before dinner has become a luxury of the past."

But these cards and visits were a source of considerable amusement and speculation to Bessie and Aunt Clem. That close upon the moiety of the guests should be strangers to their hostess is not remarkable at a first dance in London. As Bessie had said, they would have been sore put to it to find dancing men, ay, and even dancing women, without extraneous assistance. It was the puzzling out who was who that afforded such fun to Bessie and Aunt Clem.

They were very curious to see that handsome Mrs. Paynter again, though how she had come to be of their gathering they had no conception; but in that they were doomed to disappointment. Mrs. Paynter left cards without asking to be let in. Very problematical, indeed, whether her carriage contained Mrs. Paynter upon that occasion. Captain Detfield, too, had called and stopped for five-o'clock tea, and both ladies were highly interested in his visit. He had danced with both of them, and his easy, light-hearted talk had made a favorable impression. Moreover, a guardsman is a *rara avis* in Islington circles, and Bessie's immediate intimates had manifested much curiosity concerning him, both at the ball and since. That young lady was by no means insensible to the *éclat* attending such an acquaintance, and disposed to keep it up, should opportunity be forthcoming.

It must not be supposed that Bessie had conceived any particular admiration for Detfield. She was very young, and her knowledge of men and the world, so far, very limited; but she did perceive that Detfield was of a different class from those she had at present met. His quiet, easy, polished manner contrasted considerably with that of the few young men she knew. The self-contained bearing, the habitual repose of one who mixes in good society, invariably displays a striking dissimilarity to those who, immersed in the business of life, have no such opportunities. Women note these things keenly; especially do they regard the carriage of those whom they believe to mingle in circles above their own. This is why Mrs. Paynter and Detfield were objects of interest to Bessie and Aunt Clem. As for Miss Matilda, she had taken no recognition of them. The giving of a ball had absorbed all her faculties. That the ball had been a success had swallowed up all minor details concerning it. That the consequences of the ball seemed never-ending, as regarded callers and the humming of the "Valse de Fascination" by her maids, had produced a bilious irritability of temperament in Miss Matilda, which imparted a crispness to life at Roseneath House not altogether pleasant to the dwellers beneath its roof.

Miss Matilda declared vehemently she would never hear of such a thing taking place again; that she was a foolish old woman to have ever allowed herself to be

cajoled — very fond of this world just now is Miss Matilda — into such nonsense by a chit of a child just loose from a boarding-school, backed up, too, by one who ought to have known better. And here Miss Matilda would glance reproachfully at her sister. Still, when the knocker had been moderately quiet, and Miss Matilda had leisure to read peacefully, as she expressed it, which meant indulge in her usual afternoon nap, then over a cup of tea the good lady would laugh and chat with her niece and Aunt Clem, and revel in recapitulating the triumphs of the evening, till an arch demand from Bessie as to when the next was to take place, would once more remind her that she had set her face against all such nonsense for the future.

But the ball had produced one result which had been barely foreseen by the ladies of Roseneath House. It had shown to the neighborhood, and also to people somewhat beyond the immediate neighborhood, that the Misses Stanbury entertained, and that very handsomely; also that there was a young Miss Stanbury who was a very pretty girl; and, further, it was whispered about that Miss Bessie Stanbury was a young lady with gold galore and cash in the bank, — an heiress, in short; though from whom or how she inherited her riches was not quite so clear. But still, two ladies who gave balls, — Miss Matilda's determination luckily not being made known to the public, — and who had a pretty niece with a fortune, were decidedly worth cultivating.

The Misses Stanbury found themselves suddenly inundated with invitations. Bessie, under the chaperonage of Aunt Clem, took to going out a good deal. Miss Matilda, pronouncing them a couple of fools, stayed at home with her book for the most part, but showed considerable interest in the history of their proceedings the next morning all the same.

Bessie speculated at times as to whether she should come across Detfield on these occasions. It was very natural; no more than a girl wondering whether she shall meet a favorite partner, and girls are accustomed to indulge in such reflections without their feelings being at all interested. We all muse a little upon whom we are likely to meet when we contemplate going into society, and calculate whom it may be our lot to be paired off with at dinner now and again with no little anxiety. You may do pretty well what you like in a ball-room, but at a dinner-party you are the slave of your hostess. It is in her power to make the next two hours those of pleasure or boredom; no manœuvring on your part can avert her decree. If rank has its advantages it certainly also has its drawbacks; and there are occasions when the possession of a coronet is fraught with inconvenience to the wearer. Bessie, for instance, would be a pleasanter companion than deaf old Lady Slowborough; but *noblesse oblige*, and young Lord Martello, however he may deprecate the arrangement, finds himself compelled by the laws of society to take charge of that venerable and by no means amusing old peeress under such circumstances.

Still Bessie troubles her head very little about Captain Detfield. She had thought him nice, that he waltzed to perfection, that he was amusing. She would rather have liked to come across him again. Not at all insensible was Bessie to the distinction of

having such a cavalier in her train, but she had built up no romance concerning him, as girls sometimes do about a man they have met in this way. Bessie took the world as it came, and enjoyed herself as one only does at eighteen.

Cantering briskly home from a long scamper over Hampstead Heath one February afternoon, Velvet gives a tremendous start, rather shaking her young mistress, quite unprepared for such a misdemeanor on the part of her favorite, in the saddle. As Bessie recovers herself she looks round to see what has frightened her mare. The light is failing rapidly, but she speedily makes out a man seated by the roadside with a machine of some kind by his side; almost as she catches sight of him he springs to his feet, and, slightly raising his hat, regrets to have been the involuntary cause of her horse's misbehavior.

"Can he be of any use?" and as he asks the question he pats the mare's neck, and leads her back into the centre of the road again. "You were fortunately too good a horsewoman to take any harm from the shy, and no doubt your mare has recovered her manners by this, and is as ashamed of herself as I am," said the stranger, once more raising his hat.

"Yes," replied Bessie, with a light laugh; "I don't doubt she is; but she has an excuse. Captain Detfield seated by the roadside, apparently in company with a knife-grinders' barrow, would have startled me as much as it did Velvet, had I seen it without some little preparation.

"Miss Stanbury!" exclaimed the guardsman; "the light must be my excuse for not recognizing you in the first instance. I am really shocked to think that I should have affrighted you and Velvet; but, on my word," he continued, laughing, "you owe me some *amende* too. Fancy calling my new hack a knife-grinder's barrow!"

"Well, what is it you have got there with you?"

"Mind, I swear you to secrecy, Miss Stanbury; but I am giving my whole mind up to economy this winter. I have awoke suddenly to the fact that a horse may be defined as an animal that always eats and is always lame; such is my experience of that perverse quadruped of late. That barrow, Miss Stanbury, is my bicycle, a hack, I am assured, when I have once learned to ride it, that can go faster and go further than any horse foaled,—that is never lame, never hungry, but which, to wind up with, makes you think to be across the worst you ever rode would be elysium compared to it."

"But you are not going to leave your—hack—bicycle, what am I to call it, there, are you?" said the young lady, merrily.

"No; now I am rested a little we are about to recommence our doleful progress. If you can reconcile Velvet to my company I shall be proud to be your escort into town."

"We will try. Velvet has, of course, a proper contempt for all machinery; but I don't think she will object to your new steed, when she thoroughly sees what it is. We often encounter them."

"Bravo, Miss Stanbury!" replied Detfield. "No," he continued, jumping on his

bicycle, "we will push along, nominally because it is getting late, but in reality because this affair usually upsets when I try to go slow on it." Detfield had attained very fair proficiency, and kept alongside Velvet's easy canter without difficulty; that high-bred quadruped, after a disdainful snort or two, making no objection to the arrangement. "It is a good while since we met, Miss Stanbury," observed the guardsman; "but I'm afraid we have few mutual acquaintances."

"Yes, that is likely," rejoined Bessie. "London is very big, and my acquaintance not very extensive. You see I have not been what is called 'out' very long; and, though I've been to a good many parties this winter, I suppose our paths lie wide apart."

"I don't know about that," replied Charlie, somewhat mendaciously; "it is marvellous how people run across each other in London."

"Then I suppose, Captain Detfield, the fates have been against it in our case?"

"It would seem so. Fortune has treated me scurvily of late in many things. I hope she will behave better in future;" and here Charlie bethought him what an inconvenient thing a bicycle was from which to sustain a conversation with a lady.

They were now nearing Liverpool road, and had arrived at the tramway that enters the suburb on the north. Round the turn in the road came the gleaming lights of the cars. Calling to his companion to pull to one side, Detfield turned his bicycle to the other, but the big wheel caught in the iron grooves of the tram, and, with a heavy crash, Charlie came to the ground. Though a little shook he had sense enough left to roll clear. Another second, and the heavy car smashed his overturned bicycle to shivers. With a passing malediction the driver pursued the even tenor of his way, and, covered with mud, Detfield sprang to his feet.

Bessie, passing the car upon the opposite side, saw nothing of this accident. She looked round when she cleared it, and, missing her companion, at once reined up her mare. It was getting dark now, and she could see nothing of him. She sat still and waited. The bicycle, needless to say, did not appear. Then Bessie turned her horse and walked it slowly along the road. Before she had gone a hundred yards she met Detfield.

"What is the matter?" she exclaimed. "And where is this economical hack that is to wear down poor Velvet?"

"Dead!" replied Charlie, laughing; "he's been run over and killed by the street-cars. No commiseration, Miss Stanbury; you can't think how glad I am he's gone. It's such a comfort to find *the thing* as liable to accident as horse-flesh. You're witness I've tried economy, and that it turned out a failure. I shall sue the company for damages next week, and buy a hack with the proceeds."

"But you are covered with mud!" cried Bessie, as a street-lamp revealed the state of Detfield's dress. "Are you sure you are not hurt?"

"Not a bit, except in regard to my vanity. I know I'm not looking my best for a lady, and that is always painful to bear."

"Nonsense!" returned Bessie; "but here is my groom. What can he do for you?"

"Let him ride on and get me a cab, and allow me to walk alongside you to your own door. It's no distance now — "

"And your bicycle ? "

"Let its bones lie where it fell. I am well rid of it. Velvet was right in her convictions; they are things to be fought shy of."

Bessie laughed, as she gave her henchman his orders, and walked her mare slowly homewards, while Detfield strode by her side.

"It is well it is dark, Miss Stanbury, or I should compromise you fearfully. The neighborhood would say that you came home accompanied by a crossing-sweeper."

"I don't care much what the neighborhood think," replied Miss Bessie, proudly.

"Oh, please don't say so," rejoined Charlie, earnestly. "No woman, and especially a young one, can ever afford to say that. Ten thousand pardons, Miss Stanbury, I have no business to preach. I apologize, but I know the world better than you."

"You fancy, then, that I ought not to be seen coming home with you in this way," said Bessie, somewhat bitterly.

"No; don't mistake me. I was only jesting at my own disreputable appearance; but you spoke so boldly about defying your neighbors — excuse me, I was wrong, I always am — taking to a bicycle, for example. Pray forget and forgive my unfortunate remark."

A guardsman of twenty-six, preaching sermons to a girl of eighteen, — the thing was an anomaly.

They walked on in silence. Detfield striding steadily along by Velvet's side, wondered what could have possessed him to begin moralizing. But his reflections were speedily brought to a close by their arrival at the Misses Stanburys' door, where Bessie's groom and a cab were awaiting them. Charlie lifted his fair companion from her saddle, declined coming in on the plea of his bespattered habiliments, and, expressing a hope that he might have the good fortune to meet Miss Bessie again ere long, took his departure.

Bessie amused her aunts at dinner with a laughing account of the guardsman's misadventure; but more than once that evening she knit her brows, and the color in her cheek deepened as she thought of Detfield's remark. It angered and annoyed her. She deemed that he had misunderstood her; that he had taken her half-jesting, half-petulant little speech seriously. A frank, free, unaffected English girl, Bessie had no desire to be included in the category of "fast young ladies," neither was she given to such habitual contempt of the *convenances* as her retort would imply. The young lady felt a little indignant that Detfield should have taken her so literally. She did not want him, or, for the matter of that, any one, as she remarked to herself, to think of her in that way. She had done herself an injustice, and she knew it. She certainly did not merit to be regarded in that light. Why had he taken up her foolish speech so quickly ? Then she wondered what had surprised him into speaking so earnestly. It had been but a few words, apologized for as soon as uttered, brief as

a ripple on the water; and yet Bessie thought she had caught a glimpse, in those half-dozen seconds, of a chivalrous manhood, under the guardsman's usual light, nonchalant manner, such as she would fain know more of.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAJOR'S MEDITATIONS.

THINKING that you have game in your hand, and playing your cards boldly, it is rather a shock to find that you have miscalculated trumps. Deeming that you have considerably the best of your neighbor, and suddenly awaking to the fact that it is he, on the contrary, who is in a position to dictate terms to you, is also apt to disturb the equanimity of practitioners like Major Jenkens. Men who live by the weaknesses of their fellows are wont to be much put out, on finding themselves in contact with a bird of prey stronger in the wing than themselves. The major cannot get over Mr. Roxby's curt, decisive ultimatum. It is all very well to say that he will be amply recompensed for his share in the arrangement of Miss Stanbury's marriage, but the major had fully intended to be a partner in such spoil as might accrue from the successful negotiation of that affair; evident now that Mr. Roxby will have nothing to say to him concerning it, unless he enacts the *rôle* of a subordinate. This is precisely what the major specially objects to do.

It is a blow to his *amour propre.* He is not particular, as we know. He will stick at little that does not place him within the clutches of the law; but he does like to pull the strings himself. He chafes at being a mere puppet in the hands of another. He knows Roxby well; he knows that eminent city financier to be as bold as unscrupulous. Twice has he had transactions with him; and upon each occasion, clever as the major was, he had found himself thoroughly outwitted, and a mere tool at the last in the hands of his crafty and audacious coadjutor. This had irritated the major much, and he had vowed that the day should come when it should be he that would dictate how affairs should be carried out to Roxby. When that gentleman wrote him that little note to John street, Major Jenkens conceived his day was come; but the ball in Barnsbury park had rather dissipated that opinion.

Major Jenkens occupied chambers in a first floor in Charles street, Berkeley square, plainly but handsomely furnished rooms, and pervaded by their occupant's love of order. From the trim writing-table to the dwarf book-case, from the lounging-chair to the comfortable sofa, everything was arranged with almost mathematical precision. You saw no volumes upside down, or a second volume in place of a third in that book-case; no answered letters or loose note-paper were scattered about that table. Long experience had taught the major the precise angle at which that lounging-chair got most benefit of the fire, and least possible draught from the window; where the sofa

and the other furniture figured to the greatest advantage. Having made up his mind on these points, he permitted no shifting of his movables from the places assigned to them.

"The furniture, sir, in these rooms," he was wont to observe, "has been arranged after considerable study of their natural disadvantages. It is absurd to think you can place a chair here so cleverly as I can. Those who live in a place understand where the draughts and other drawbacks lie. All houses, chambers, lodgings, etc., have their weak points, blemishes not to be counteracted. Sit where I put you, and you will be comfortable. Move your chair according to your whim, and don't blame me if you have a crick in the neck."

It was true that the major was not given to entertain visitors. It was only upon rare occasions that he invited a guest even to smoke a cigar in his chambers; and, social buccaneer that he was, yet he was scrupulous as an Arab under his own roof tree. If you dined with him at his club, and hinted at *écarté* to pass away the evening, you would find him a dangerous antagonist, albeit he did not play very often; but nobody had ever succeeded in making the major produce cards in his own rooms. It was probably matter of calculation. When the major played, it was in the way of business, and he scorned to play for sugar-plums; but he was too well aware of what the world would say of a man like himself, who should win a big stake in his own chambers. The major thought rightly that he had a character to maintain. There were not wanting scandal-mongers, who would have retorted that he had a character to obtain.

The major, enveloped in a well-wadded dressing-gown, is ensconced in that most scientifically disposed lounging-chair, and immersed in thought. He is stimulating his intellect with a large "cabana," and some cognac and seltzer, — aids to reflection by no means to be despised upon occasion. He is gradually piecing out why it is that Mr. Roxby appealed to him at all about finding a husband for Bessie Stanbury, and he has arrived at a very fair guess at the truth.

"Yes," he mutters, slowly ejecting a long wreath of tobacco-smoke, "he must intend to seize upon a good slice of that girl's money on her wedding, and I suppose he thought rightly, if she was snapped up by any of his business friends, or any young fellow in that way, that the settlements would be looked pretty sharply after. If, on the other hand, he can marry her to some broken-down swell from this end of town, he doubtless reckons on his being a man too needy to inquire very closely into things, and too anxious for the marriage to dare to quarrel with his bride-elect's guardian, — one who could put his veto on the match for the next three years, at all events, and without whose aid and countenance the wedding would in all probability never take place. Possible," continued the major, musingly, "that my esteemed friend, Roxby, has already made away with a considerable portion of that thirty thousand pounds. It wouldn't surprise me in the least. However, it's not likely that he will allow a glimmer of that to leap out. This young Detfield, too, apparently, is not disposed to second my exertions on his behalf, — a piece of imbecility on his part that I shall have

to counsel Simmonds & Co. to put a speedy stopper on. I don't know, but it certainly does occur to me that Roxby might find him out not quite so docile, when it comes to the point, as he reckons upon. Rather a self-willed young man. Hum! I don't know that I have made a very good selection, and yet at the moment he seemed the very man. Absurd, situated as he is, that he should presume to differ from his advisers. It's ungrateful, that's what it is," growled the major wrathfully.

But, as he thought it over, the major's face cleared a little. True, at the first glance, it would seem very much against his, the major's, interest, if Detfield should decline to woo the heiress pointed out to him; yet if he should do so, and then prove refractory at the last moment; suppose he should win the girl's consent, and decline to accede to old Roxby's conditions, whatever they might be. The major rather chuckled at the idea. He had already perceived that, difficulties or no difficulties, Detfield had a will of his own, and was capable of facing all the consequences of his embarrassments sooner than extricate himself by a distasteful marriage. It was equally probable that Roxby's proposals, when he should come to hear of them, would strike the guardsman in quite another light from that in which the financier viewed them. The major had no idea what they would be, but it did occur to him that what Roxby would airily designate a little business transaction, Detfield might apply a very different epithet to.

"Yes," mused the major, "that really would suit me better than anything else. If he should win the girl and come to loggerheads with old Roxby about the settlements, my fee certainly would be in danger, but the old fox would have to show his hand, and I might pick up a little information that would give me the whip-hand of my dear friend Roxby for life. I should think *that* cheap at £500. But confound that fellow, Detfield, how's he to win a girl if he won't make love to her?—and he's refused all the invitations Roxby has sent him. We must make him feel his difficulties a little; he must understand that Simmonds requires to be humored; that whatever his ultimate intentions may be, 'going in' for a wealthy marriage is the only thing, except a settlement, to pacify that Christianized Jew just now, and I must trust to the girl herself and Mrs. Paynter's counsels to do the rest. It was a masterly conception that of deceiving her with regard to which Miss Stanbury was the heiress. Such a coquette as Mrs. Paynter would never resign an admirer to a possible rival; I have only to take care that she does not discover the mistake until too late."

The major was an artist in social intrigue. He revelled in it, and wove or repaired the broken threads of his numerous schemes with all the patience and industry of a hungry spider. He had always been particularly fortunate in the delicate operation of bringing two people together with a view to matrimony, and rubbed his hands softly as he looked back upon more than one successful negotiation of that description.

"Hum, that's settled," murmured the major, gently throwing himself back in his chair, and watching the smoke-wreaths as they curled above his head; "that is to

say, I've decided how I'm to play my game, and what will be the most profitable result to Claxby Jenkens, — the only person I have to care about in the affair. Now," continued the major, knocking the ash of his cigar carefully into a little china saucer, "I have two other bits of business that require immediate attention. Item first, the Montague Gores have returned from their wedding trip, and I must see Mrs. Montague. It is a thousand pities I found her too late. If I could have spoken to her before that marriage! What sort of a marriage is this that she has made? How came it about? Psha!" he muttered, "what nonsense! don't I know? Left as she was, poor child, what else could she do, but accept the first man that offered her a home? — and I had intended that it should be so different. I had meant that Cissy should choose whom she liked this time. I chose for her the first; I thought I had insured her wealth, at all events. I think if I had met Hemsworth a year or two ago, knowing what I do now, he would not have lived as long as he did. I suppose he would have fought if collared, and by my soul he'd have a fair chance to judge of my shooting;" and the major's eyes gleamed with a savage light, such as men's carry when the thirst for blood possesses them. "I kept away from them; I thought it best; what have I on earth to love but her? Well, I didn't want — no, of course; I'm a disreputable old vagabond, and the world says hard things of me, — would say harder, perhaps, if it dared. I didn't want my darling to be clogged with an old father, of whom such queer stories are afloat. I dare say she thought me unkind. They call me hard; I am; but it's all for her. Cissy, I must see you again, my child, if only to hear from your own lips that you are happy."

No one of Claxby Jenkens' acquaintance would have recognized their cool, cynical friend in the man who, with eyes suffused with tears, bent over the fire and gulped down a rising sob or two with difficulty. Yet it was so. The battered old heart, hard as granite to the world generally, had this one soft spot in it, an oasis in the desert. Claxby Jenkens, in all his scheming, plotting, and plundering, had ever an eye to leaving a snug fortune to his daughter. His one anxiety for some years had been to get the girl settled in life. He knew too well what sort of reception a daughter of his was likely to receive in society. When he had married her to Hemsworth, he deemed his end accomplished. He had looked more at Hemsworth's position than at his character. It was the light in which a man like the major would be sure to regard a *parti* for his daughter. He disappeared immediately after the wedding; his reasons we already know. It was well, perhaps, that it had been so.

The major would have been likely to call Hemsworth sternly to account for his neglect of his wife, a father-in-law with whom quibble or evasion would have scarce passed current. Mark Hemsworth had been just the man to have cowered before him, but to have brutally avenged himself on Cissy afterwards. However, that was a past now dead and buried. It was the future that was to be looked to; and no fond and respectable father of a family ever felt more anxious about the happiness of his favorite daughter than did this world-worn social marauder.

"Yes," he muttered, "I must see Cissy in the first place; not much difficulty about

that. In the second, I must find Tim Turbottle. Who could have dreamed of his leaving the old cigar-shop, and taking it into his head to wander about the country? However, of course he is to be found; it is only a question of time. It will be as well not to be in a hurry. I shall be better able to form an opinion of Mr. Montague Gore after a little. If you have made as great a mistake for yourself, child, as I did for you, it will be well that you should have something to fall back upon." With which reflection the major emptied his goblet and betook himself to bed.

Claxby Jenkens thinks, like many other intriguers, that he holds the strings that shall guide the destinies of three or four persons in this history; but it may likely prove the old story, that those he deems his puppets will not dance to his pipe. It occurs to these diplomatists, at times, to find that they have failed to gauge the course that man or woman will take under certain conditions. We know what we ourselves would do under such circumstances, but forget that others may regard things in a different light. We scheme to make the happiness of our friends, perhaps, and go a long way to make them miserable. Ideas of Elysium do not always coincide. Above all, we do not agree with our intimates concerning what is best for us. The major would fain smooth Cissy's path in this world, and yet he had failed signally so far. It is possible that his further manœuvres may prove equally unsuccessful.

Still he is so wedded to his accustomed mole-like strategy that he could hardly be induced to try a straightforward and above-board course; so impressed with the maxim that his neighbor is continually striving to do his duty by getting the better of him, that it behoves him to work with secrecy and caution. Much exercised in his mind and strengthened in his creed by the conduct of neighbor Roxby at this time, and feeling that mankind is less than ever to be trusted, and that his designs and intentions cannot be too carefully shrouded from those whom they may concern, the fates are working for him more than he knows; but your social diplomatist is only too apt to mar what he would fain achieve by injudicious interference. The major is an artist, it must be admitted, but the man who trusts nobody invariably pays the penalty of misconstruing human nature.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. PAYNTER'S SACRIFICE.

MRS. PAYNTER has hardly yet got over Cissy's wedding. That lively lady alludes to it with a mock pathos, irresistibly ludicrous.

"A nice thing for her, of course it is, poor darling! She had nothing, you know, and will make Montague Gore a charming wife." Mrs. Paynter is apt to be a little incoherent when excited, and speaks as if poverty was a necessary ingredient of a charming wife. "But the ceremony was dreadful. It was quite shocking to be

married in that way; really, you know it might as well have been all done at a registrar's office. Nobody there, and I in such a lovely dress, — it was quite sinful not to be seen in it. Yes, we stole into church as if engaged in some criminal proceeding; if we had been after the communion plate it would have been impossible to have felt more guilty. I was conscious of a creeping sensation all the time, such as I presume accompanies infringement of the law. I cowered beneath the eye of the beadle, and shouldn't have been surprised if I had been taken into custody at the church door. No," Mrs. Paynter would conclude, with a shrug of her shoulders and upraising of her delicate brows, "I can't say what I may take part in before I die, but I'll never, never, have anything to do with a quiet wedding again."

"Well," replied Charlie Detfield, when this sad story was unfolded to him, "all weddings are rather melancholy affairs, — don't you think so?"

"Certainly not," retorted Mrs. Paynter, her blue eyes dancing with mirth; "I expect yours to be rather good fun. When do you marry your grandmother? Beg pardon, Charlie, I mean the Islington woman."

"I should think never," retorted Detfield, brusquely.

"But you must, you know," said Mrs. Paynter, gently. "How are the debts ever to be settled, if you don't? You won't tell me much; men never do about such troubles; but, my poor Charlie, I know all, — never mind how. Marry money you must, and that very soon. She is not so very old, and she looks a nice, good-natured woman. It will all do very well."

"Ah! you know I've the rope round my neck, do you?" exclaimed Detfield, bitterly. "Doesn't it ever strike you that there may be other ways of escaping from my troubles? That one can sell out, cut London, and begin life anew?"

"Yes, Charlie, I have thought of all that," replied the lady, in a voice so low that it was scarce above a whisper. "Begin life again, eh? But how? It is so difficult for such as you."

Coquette as she was, Lizzie was thoroughly in earnest. She felt keenly for Detfield, and, perhaps, realized the hopelessness of his position better than he did. She was very fond of him in her way. Do you ask, did she love him? No. Lizzie Paynter's heart was in the safe-keeping of the last man society would have suspected of possessing it, — her husband. But that did not in the least prevent her having a *tendresse* for some one of her admirers; besides, Lizzie invariably had a *ciscebo*, and Detfield at present was in possession of that post.

Charlie was silent. He, too, when he had thought over his future, had sometimes wondered what there was that he could turn his hand to. It is not so easy to say, after half-a-dozen years of a military life, how best to set about earning your bread.

"No, believe me," continued Mrs. Paynter, at length, "this marriage is the best thing for you. She is certain to be married, and may light upon a very much worse husband than you. Of course, she is a little old for you, but you can't have everything. She, at all events, will have a gentleman for a husband; and I don't think, Charlie, you could ever ill-treat a woman."

"Does it ever strike you that all this sounds somewhat singular from your lips?"

"Yes; but it is for your own good. Do you think, if things were otherwise, I would let you marry if I could prevent it? No, Charlie, I am giving up something too. We must bury the past. I shall wear mourning for—for what's been for a little; and then we shall be friends, stanch friends, you know, for life." And Mrs. Paynter bowed her head in attitude of the prettiest resignation.

It was a curious thing, but Detfield had fallen by accident into the same mistake that Mrs. Paynter had been intentionally led into by the major. He had thought rightly, that Bessie Stanbury was the heiress, in the first instance; but Mrs. Paynter had laughingly pointed out Aunt Clem to him, in the course of that evening at Barnsbury park, as the lady who possessed thirty thousand pounds. Charlie, very careless about the matter, and having little intention of getting out of his difficulties in such fashion, had at once imagined himself mistaken. He thought it so much more probable that the elderly spinster was the wealthy bride recommended to his notice, than that pretty girl in all the flush and excitement of her first ball. Detfield was quite as convinced that Miss Clementina was the lady rejoicing in all these golden allurements as Mrs. Paynter herself. To him Aunt Clem represented the Miss Kilmansegge of Islington. He did not think it necessary to mention his last meeting with Bessie. Men are shy of mentioning their discomfitures to the woman they love, we know, and the bicycle business was likely to evoke more laughter than sympathy. To express admiration for one pretty woman to another is usually considered injudicious, but it certainly requires a clear conscience. Charlie was dimly aware of thinking rather more about Bessie Stanbury than his allegiance to Mrs. Paynter quite warranted.

"I suppose it must be so, sooner or later," he replied, at length. "I have got pretty near to the end of my tether; and, whatever may be my destiny, I am not likely to see much more of you. Yes, I'm about broke. You'll miss me a little, Lizzie, I think."

"You know I shall," interposed Mrs. Paynter, rapidly. "You know I would do anything in my power to help you. Advice is all I have to give, and once more I say emphatically, marry the heiress."

"Suppose the heiress won't marry me?" returned Detfield, smiling.

"I shall suppose nothing of the sort, sir, till you have tried. I think, Charlie, you could make love rather nicely if you gave your mind to it."

"Ah! you think so."

"You don't deserve an answer, but just for once I'll say I know it," returned Mrs. Paynter, with an arch flash of her bright eyes.

"And knowing that?"

"I say go away and do it."

"I don't see the necessity of going away."

"But I do," cried Mrs. Paynter, springing to her feet, and giving an impatient stamp of her little foot. "What fools you men are! Charlie, if I didn't care for you, I should let you keep philandering about me to the last. But it can't be. You must

think of yourself. Leave me now, and next time I see you tell me you are engaged to the heiress. You'll have no truer or stancher friend than Lizzie Paynter. Do you understand me now?"

"Not in the least," replied Detfield, curtly. "I have a strong idea that I am dismissed, — to make way for somebody else, I presume."

"Unjust!" she cried, and for a second she turned her face from him and leant upon the mantel-piece. "Well, let it be so, if you misunderstand me now," she continued, facing him, and rearing her head haughtily, "Miss Stanbury will gain a worse husband than I thought."

"Pardon me," he said, in a low voice, after a short pause. "The bitter idea of parting with you must be my excuse for my brutal remark. I would I could recall it. I do understand you, and if I don't do what you wish, believe me, I recognize you would banish me for my own good."

"That's like your old self, Charlie," exclaimed Lizzie, extending her hand. "Now say good-by, and remember, firm friends ever."

He pressed her hands passionately, raised them for an instant to his lips, then murmured, "Firm friends ever," and was gone.

Mrs. Paynter threw herself back in her chair, and mused very sadly over the scene she had just gone through. Her life was passed in these flirtations, yet she was always to a certain extent quite in earnest at the time. She had been very fond of Detfield, — that is to say, in her way. He had suited her exactly. He had never made an attempt to pass that indescribable boundary at which Mrs. Paynter considered her admirers' homage ought to stop; that her admirers should sometimes not quite recognize this particular point was scarcely to be wondered at. But Mrs. Paynter was very impatient with any mistake concerning it. She had been most thoroughly truthful in what she had told Detfield. If she had cared about him less, she would have kept him dangling about her. She dismissed him, because she honestly thought that was the only thing to save him. It may sound like an anomaly to say that a woman entertains a sincere love and esteem for her husband, and yet lives a life of perpetual flirtation — is never satisfied without an admirer at her side; but the thing is. There are women such coquettes by nature that they crave admiration as an opium-eater does the fatal drug. It becomes ingrained into their very being. Their heart is never involved, their feelings, perhaps, slightly, their vanity considerably. The parading an admirer before the world is a great gratification to such women. They have no desire that their affairs should be hid from society. Society usually has its mouth very full of them, but, after all, it is generally their more demure sisters who occasion society to hold up its hands, and make moan over their backslidings.

"It might all fit in so very nicely," thought Mrs. Paynter. "If he would but try in earnest, he would be sure to succeed. Women at that age, unless they are purse-proud, are apt to get a little uneasy lest they should not get married at all. She didn't give me the idea of being puffed up by her riches. A pleasant, good-tempered body,

I should say. A little old for Charlie, perhaps; decidedly so indeed, — might almost be his mother; but we could soften it down a good deal if we got her into the hands of a West-end modiste. These fifteen years might be toned down to seven or eight (about the actual difference between them) with a little attention to the toilet, — a mere nothing. But he! there's the difficulty, — he'll not make an effort. I am sacrificing myself for nothing, and he is so very nice. These men they never do understand what's good for them. He'd rather — hem! talk to me, than make love to Miss Stanbury," and here Mrs. Paynter rose, and, crossing the room, deliberately contemplated her pretty face in the glass.

The result was apparently satisfactory, for, after gazing at herself for some seconds, an arch smile stole over her countenance, and, with a light laugh, she exclaimed: —

"Perhaps he's right. If I were a man, I think I also should prefer it."

Of a verity, the major secured a valuable auxiliary when he conceived the bold idea of calling upon Mrs. Paynter.

As for Detfield he is at present something like the Irishman's pig, that allowed itself to be driven so peaceably towards Cork, because it was under the delusion that its owner wanted it to go to Limerick. This marriage is very distasteful to him; he had declared he would not repair his broken fortunes in that way. But men have made such resolutions before, and yielded at last to the special pleading of friends, and to the force of circumstances. In the mean while, under the impression that she is a portionless girl, Charlie bids fair to glide into a flirtation with Bessie Stanbury. Of course there is every possible reason for his not doing so, regarding Bessie as he does; but the perversity of pigs is often paralleled in human nature. A tendency to fall in love with those they ought not has been a common frailty of humanity since the world began.

He meditates a good deal upon wooing the Islington heiress, as he strolls leisurely down Portland place. It is so very odd, he thinks, that Lizzie Paynter should advocate it so warmly. It is rather unlike her. Curious it was, with the Paynters he first made his bow in Barnsbury park. By the way, now he comes to think of it, it was Mrs. Paynter who had made him accept that invitation. How came she to be thus travelling out of her usual sphere? What took her into a society so foreign to her accustomed haunts? As Charlie reflects on this, he begins to have a vague suspicion that there is a conspiracy to marry him to Miss Clementina. But then how came it about that the major and Mrs. Paynter should be engaged together in such a scheme? Why, they were not even acquainted. Suddenly flashes across him a shadowy recollection of seeing them talking together at that ball. He cannot remember distinctly, yet he has an impression that it was so. Well, suppose he swims with the stream and tries his luck?

"I shan't break my heart if she says No, that's one comfort," he muttered, with a grim smile, "and I shall feel tolerably mean if she chances to say Yes. Of course, it's done every day, and I don't suppose I am justified in refusing good counsel. Why

shouldn't I also go in for money? There is one thing, — it would necessitate visiting a good deal in Barnsbury park, and I shall see something more of Bessie Stanbury, which will be pleasant, if nothing else is. Settled, carried, no one dissenting. I am to make love to the old lady, — a matter of business, and if I have a chance to flirt a little with the niece; well, I am a weak mortal, and shall really deserve some slight relaxation. I shall come to grief over it, I know. I've a conviction I'm opening the campaign on wrong principles, and shall be eloquent in the wrong place. What I have been trying to say all day to the aunt will come blundering out to the niece in the evening, and I shall wind up by proposing to the wrong woman. Well, it's a consolation to think that I can't be in a bigger mess than I am now, and if I do lose my head, and ask Miss Bessie to marry me, we can't get any further. We can't wed upon my debts, and, by Jove! that's about all the property left me. Paragraph for the 'Post': 'We regret to announce that Captain Detfield, of the Household Brigade, has succumbed to the prevailing epidemic. His resources proving unequal to the demands made upon them, after a lingering and painful struggle, he departed (for the Continent) tranquilly this morning. His loss will be much felt (for forty-eight hours) in the fashionable world, in which he was an universal favorite.'" And then Charlie indulged in a low laugh at his own little jest, — such laughter as men make when they mock their own miseries; such laughter as rings cracked and hollow on the ear, and prefaces at times criminal solution of the knot men's follies have tied.

Charlie Detfield spoke of his difficulties lightly, but they were gnawing sharply at his heart-strings nevertheless, and the bitterest drop in his cup, perhaps, was the thought of leaving his regiment. He loved the old corps very dearly, and regretted much that his days in it were already numbered.

CHAPTER XX.

AFTER THE HONEYMOON.

MONTAGUE GORE has returned from his wedding trip, and established himself and bride in Park Crescent. He is charmed with his wife. He has found her the brightest and most intelligent of companions, and yet even now there falls at times a slight shadow across his life that causes him to wince, and wonder whether it will ever be swept away. Cissy is always kind, courteous, and good-tempered, but he feels that there is an inner life of which she reveals nothing. It is not that she is a lifeless statue; on the contrary, she displays plenty of animation, and enters eagerly into such sight-seeing or society as may fall in their way. She is always pleasant and bright in her manner, but no caress ever escapes her. She yields placidly to his kiss, but she never returns it.

Montague Gore thinks at times sadly that he has failed to win this woman's heart;

that for all the love he lavishes upon her, she has none to give back. Will he succeed in touching it; or is she of so reticent a temperament that she will ever keep that inner self locked firmly within her own bosom? He knows there are such natures,—cool, phlegmatic, self-reliant beings, in whom the craving for sympathy, so common to mankind, does not exist. Can Cissy be one of these? He thinks not. The way her face lights up when anything pleases her forbids him to think so. Montague Gore arrives at the conclusion that the key to his wife's heart is not in his keeping.

He is one of those highly sensitive, imaginative men usually so ingenious in self-torture. The great catastrophe of his early life had crushed all thought of woman's love out of him for years. For some time after that terrible blow he abandoned all society, and took refuge in hard work. And work came to him in plenty; even his brethren on circuit were astonished at the quantity he managed to get through. Now he had once more given full rein to his affections, and was sensitive as a woman in his love. Again and again he told himself that he was a fool, and tried hard to put this thought away from him. She had told him, when he asked her to marry him, that she liked, but did not love, him.

Well, was she not all that he had any right to expect? Could he not rest satisfied with quiet regard and esteem, and trust to time for the rest? Plenty of men would be perfectly satisfied with what Cissy gave to him; but he unluckily was not one of them. He thirsted for her entire love. Cissy would have told him, had he talked to her on the subject, that she did not believe it was in her nature to love in that manner; but it may be doubted whether he would have derived much comfort from that assurance. Resolutely though he might try to put this thought away from him, angry as he felt sometimes at his own folly; still it was ever recurring to his mind, floating dimly before him in the bustle of the courts at Westminster, standing out clear and distinct in the stillness of the night-time, gathering strength slowly but surely, as all such morbid ideas will. Montague Gore is cherishing a phantom that may chance to lay his hearth desolate should it grow up.

And yet the charm of her manner, her piquant, graceful ways, increase the wild, passionate love that he has for her daily. Cissy's nature, though she is utterly unaware of it, is expanding under the tender watchfulness of her husband. In that first luckless marriage of hers she had been treated alternately as a pet child, and with brutal neglect. Bullied and sneered at, she had lost confidence in her own powers. She had many times wondered whether she was indeed the fool Mark Hemsworth so continually asserted her to be.

She had shrunk from the coarse associates to whom he so often introduced her. Her woman's intuitive delicacy had forbid her to make a friend in all that money-making, speculating circle, in which her Paris life had been passed,—fungi of the Bourse, who were rolling in riches to-day, and Heaven knows where on the morrow; men who bought everything, reckless of price, if it were the fashion, but could no more understand the pictures which adorned their walls, or the music they paid such

sums to listen to, than if they had been bereft of sense and hearing; women whose sole end was to outshine each other in dress, equipage, and display.

During these five years Cissy's inner nature had laid dormant. Her finer feelings and intellectual faculties, from the time she left the convent, had been locked, congealed, as the sea in an Arctic winter; to be the best-dressed woman in Paris, her highest ambition; to be present at the first exhibition of anything notable, play, opera, a two-headed child, or a Patagonian giantess, the subject of her most strenuous desire and intriguing. Yet in the midst of all this incessant turmoil, the girl, for she was no more, had a vague feeling that she was made for something better. She would sit at times before some of those pictures that Mark Hemsworth had collected from mere pride of purse, and gaze at them till the painter's higher meaning stole gradually into her mind. She would occasionally become so absorbed at the opera as to turn a deaf ear to the vapid compliments with which she was so constantly beset, and give cause to their utterers to petulantly endorse Mark Hemsworth's statement, that his wife was a fool. And yet they were constrained to admit Madame Hemsworth could talk well at times.

One of the first things that had attracted her to Lizzie Paynter was this lady's soft, caressing manner. Secondly, Mrs. Paynter was cultivated in her tastes, and, in spite of her irrepressible passion for flirtation, had a genuine admiration for art as far as she understood it, whether it was in poetry, painting, music, or fiction. Another thing, too, although it may seem almost an anomaly, was that, despite her besetting weakness, there was something very genuine about Lizzie. She could not help that; but, if men only understood her, she was very honest even then. It was they who made the mistake, if they did not comprehend that the affair was to be limited to a little sentiment.

But now Cissy was living a very different life. Montague Gore treated her always with deference, and constantly talked to her if he did not consult her about his own work. She was thrown in contact with clever men, and heard much talk that interested her with regard to books, music, etc. Her husband's friends, some of them were engaged more or less in such occupations, and listened to Cissy's naïve, spirited comments on these matters with evident pleasure and amusement. She took to reading also. It annoyed her to be ignorant of what was current topic of conversation amongst the world in which she now lived. You would have said she was improving every day, and adapting herself, week by week, to be a fit mate for the man she had married.

She comes into her pretty breakfast-parlor, fresh as a rose this May morning, attired in a bewitching costume, highly suggestive of Paris to a feminine eye. Her husband glances fondly at her, as she makes her appearance, and exclaims: —

"Late, Cissy. Be quick with the tea, please, child, for I have no time to spare. Rather an ominous pile of letters for you."

"I am so sorry. I don't know how I came to be so late. You shall have your tea, though, in a moment;" and Cissy busied herself with the cups and saucers.

Her husband, meanwhile, betook himself to his meal with the air of a man who had no time to spare. Cissy, having completed her arrangements, commenced to investigate her correspondence. As her husband said, it was rather an ominous little heap that lay by the side of her plate. Square-shaped, unpromising billets, directed in stiff, clerkly handwriting, such as are wont to be more or less familiar to most of us about Christmas time. Cissy knit her brows more than once as she ran her eye over them, and at last could not refrain from an ejaculation.

"A hundred and fifty-three pounds!" she exclaimed. "The wretch! Why, I have had positively nothing for it."

Montague Gore raised his head. A milliner's bill was an experience that he had not yet encountered.

"Sounds a deal of money, Cissy. Is that from your dressmaker?"

"From one of them," replied his wife, carelessly. "I shouldn't mind it so much, but she is not worth the price she charges. I have to go to Paris when I want anything nice; but, not living there, I can't deal altogether with my old modiste."

Montague Gore becomes conscious of a second revelation. A man usually confines himself to one tailor; but ladies who aspire to "art in petticoats" find work for many milliners.

"I hope devoutly that those malevolent-looking epistles are not all on quite so large a scale," remarked Gore, somewhat curiously.

"They come to a good bit of money; but you needn't look frightened, Montague, this time," rejoined Cissy, laughing; "I have a little of my own money left still. You see I had to get some things for our wedding, and it costs so much to dress decently nowadays, and one must do it."

She said this with the air of one who lays down a proposition which admits of no possible dispute.

Gore remained silent for a moment. Like the generality of men, he was only conscious that a woman's dress became her. He had no idea of the details that went to make up the picture. He admired it as a whole; but whether it was expensive or inexpensive never entered his thoughts. He did know his wife was always dressed most becomingly, but it had never occurred to him that even her plainest toilets were very costly. Just now he is putting together "a hundred and fifty-three pounds" and "dressing decently." It strikes him that he does not quite understand that last phrase.

He smiles as he replies, "Well, my dear, of course you must be what you call decent, but I should have thought it might have been done a little cheaper."

"I dare say it might; but I'll own that I'm stupid about such things, and never can manage to get things so cheap as other people. I'm no use at bargaining, you see."

"Never mind; all I meant was that I should think there are lots of ladies in London who can't afford to have two or three milliners' bills of that amount, and yet contrive to look decent."

"Do you know what Lizzie says?" cried Cissy, laughing. "She says there are two classes of women, — those who dress themselves, and those who clothe themselves."

"Meaning, I presume, those who are rich and those who are poor."

"Nothing of the sort. Lizzie is quite right; there are plenty of women who go about clad in silks and satins, and, it is to be hoped, not quite in their right minds; and there are plenty more who trot about *dressed* in cheap muslins or merinos."

"Well, when you feel economically disposed, I should recommend those latter fabrics to your notice."

"No," replied Cissy, shaking her head, "they don't suit me. I am very sorry for you, Montague, but I only look my best in rich attire; and the woman who is not always anxious to look her best is absorbed in pursuit of political rights, elevating her status, freeing herself from the slavery your sex has imposed on us, or some equally unfeminine employment."

"I must be off. Good-by," said Gore, as he rose and kissed his wife. "Don't think I want you to count your shillings too closely, but recollect we have not Aladdin's lamp in the house, and that we are people of moderate means."

"Moderate means!" thought Cissy, as the door closed behind him. "Now, I do wonder what I am to understand by that. I never asked him anything about his income yet; but I think I must. I don't want to get Montague into any difficulty, and I know I've been taught so far only to dress and spend money. If I have to economize, I'm sure I shan't know how to begin."

"Moderate means" is rather an indefinite term. So is "dressing decently." Cissy is as puzzled how to interpret the former as her husband how to understand the latter.

But Cissy has not quite come to the end of her correspondence. There is a letter or two left unopened, and, as she listlessly turns them over, her face flushes. Her eyes sparkle as they meet the neat, precise superscription that is on the little note at the bottom of the heap. How well she knew the handwriting once! What years it is since she has seen it, — writing of one who loved her well, and whom she also loved. What secret tears she had shed because he so ruthlessly, so unaccountably, abandoned her!

He had told her when she married Mark Hemsworth that she would neither see nor hear from him for a long time. He had enjoined her never to speak of him, — never even to acknowledge the relationship.

She could not understand why, but she had promised and stood loyally to her word. She had thought over it many a time since, and wondered what it was that he dreaded. Had he been connected with dangerous mercantile speculations, or was he involved in some of those numberless political schemes, always, as she knew, rife in Paris for overturning the government, whatever it might be? She was such a child at the time of her marriage it was little likely that he would trust her, kind and indulgent father as he had ever proved. Still, he had most solemnly adjured her

never to speak of him, never to inquire after him till she should hear from himself. Then she was to be guided by what he wrote, and now here was a letter from him after all these years. Did he even know, she thought, how often his Cissy had wanted him in those troublous days that she had been Mark Hemsworth's wife? How many times, when heartsick from neglect or brutal gibes, she had longed for some friend or relation on whose bosom to pour forth the salt tears which she confided only to her pillow, — for some one to whom she might sob forth the story of her ill-treatment and unhappiness? How often she had thought that if he only knew he would have taken his darling away, or read Mark Hemsworth such a lesson as would have ensured her from insult, at all events, in the future.

The circle in which she moved, though they deemed Cissy a fortunate woman, inasmuch as she possessed an excellent establishment and perfect equipages, were not blind to Mark Hemsworth's jeering manner to his young wife, nor to the fact of those more cowardly insults which a coarse-minded libertine can pass on the woman who has the misfortune to be tied to him. More than one of her acquaintances, wedded as they were to dress and display, had wondered how she bore with Mark Hemsworth.

But Hemsworth, although he did not know the reason, knew that her father intended to reside entirely in England, and that Cissy was ignorant of his address. He had not dared to treat her so otherwise. Whatever else he might be, the major was a man of nerve and determination. His son-in-law had been simply a boisterous bully, and, as a matter of course, an arrant cur at bottom.

Cissy's hand shook a little as she at last broke open the envelope. What he was, what he might be reckoned amongst men, she neither thought nor cared. To her in her girlhood he had been kindest, most loving, most patient of fathers, and she had had so few to care for her. There was a mist before her eyes as she read: —

"Dearest Cissy, — You have doubtless thought me cruel, unkind, forgetful, for never seeing or writing to you in all these years. My child, now I have arrived at some idea of what you have gone through, I am covered with shame, anger, and confusion. It is well, perhaps, that I did not know sooner the story of your Paris life. I know it even now imperfectly, but my pulses tingle yet with what I have learned recently. Hemsworth is gone, so there is happily no more to be said, though I acknowledge still to a feeling of regret that it is out of my power to call him to account for his treatment of you. This is a story of the past, however; let it lie buried.

"Cissy, don't think I deserted you. I cut myself off from all knowledge of you, as I thought, for your advantage. I could not explain why to you then. I can hardly do so now without humiliating myself. You will not force your father to do this. It was a mistake. I thought I left you settled in life, with everything a reasonable woman could wish for. That your husband would turn out what he did never entered my head. I did my utmost to discover you, when I learnt Hemsworth was dead. I found you, but it may be too late. When I did see you, it was before the altar of St.

George's Church; I saw you married for the second time. I am perhaps nervous and fanciful, child; but it is possible that this marriage also may turn out unhappily. I know how you were left; that you had no choice hardly but to marry. Could I have found you a little sooner, you would have known, at all events, that was no necessity. I must see you, to learn from your own lips that you are well, and wedded to a man who at least treats you with kindness and respect. But the reasons that made me separate myself from you still exist. I cannot call at your house. Your husband must remain ignorant of the connection between us; indeed, I would prefer that he should be ignorant of my very existence. Write me a line then here, to tell me when and where I can see you. Till then,

"Believe me, dearest Cissy,

"Your affectionate father,

"JOHN CLAXBY JENKENS.

"6 Charles street, Berkeley square."

Cissy read this letter through twice, and then sat twisting it absently in her fingers. She was thinking how long it was since she had seen the writer; how attentive and kind he had always been to her girlish whims and wishes; how delighted she would be to see him once more. It was almost as if he had come back from the grave, she had so long and so entirely lost sight of him. It never entered her head that clandestine meetings are always liable to involve a woman in trouble; of course she should keep his secret, and do his bidding. She had always done what he told her. She would write at once and say where they were to meet; of course, under the circumstances, it must be somewhere rather out of the way. Cissy opened a map of London, and pondered as to where she should appoint her rendezvous. She did not know the big city very well, but it suddenly struck her that some of the squares lying west between her house and the Marble Arch usually wore a deserted appearance, and one of these squares it should be.

CHAPTER XXI.

A QUINTETTE.

THAT Mrs. Paynter would be one of Cissy's earliest visitors was only natural. She really, in her butterfly fashion, was very fond of the bride, and had been immensely pleased at that rather necessary, and, as she considered it, most appropriate marriage.

"She is charming and penniless, — he is nice and has a nice income, — what can be more suitable?" demanded Mrs. Paynter. "Charming women without money are or ought to be the destiny of men who have, — those are their affinities. You see I study Swedenborg and Spiritualism. John was mine, and we suit one another exactly; ask

him. He don't mind my flirting. He doesn't bother himself much about me unless I want anything, then he takes any amount of trouble to get it for me. As I am always wanting something, John is perpetually interested in me. I was made for him. He would have ceased to care about a woman who was not exigeante as myself. There's another thing," — and the volatile lady's face softened as she made this admission, — "dear old John is the only man who does know me, both the worst and the best of me."

It is possible, not perhaps very uncommon, for man and woman to tread life's path together, and never comprehend each other to the end.

"You've a very pretty house, Cissy," exclaimed Mrs. Paynter, on her first visit, "and of course I think the situation perfection. It is near me, and I am perfection, you know. Besides, it's delightful to have you established so close. It has taken me all this time to get over your surreptitious wedding. How could you submit to such a thing? I felt a guilty creature for days afterwards, — as if I had assisted at something unlawful. Did you feel married? Do you feel married yet?"

"Montague and I both wished a quiet wedding," replied Cissy, laughing.

"I don't mind quiet weddings," rejoined Mrs. Paynter, solemnly, "but yours was a clandestine marriage."

"Not quite; but who had we to ask? You and your husband were my sole friends in London. Montague only wanted the man or two he had, Mr. Brine and the others."

"I never saw him before, but I don't like Mr. Brine," returned Mrs. Paynter, sententiously. "A man who had nothing civil to say to a woman who looked as well as I did that day must be a monster, — one of those connecting links with the Zoölogical that Mr. Darwin talks about."

"You did look well," replied Cissy, with a little enthusiasm of the Paris days. "It should have been a gay wedding, if only to let the world see you."

"My dear," said Mrs. Paynter, with a mock expression of anguish, "I was a poem, — a poem without interpreters. Let us drop the subject. I shall never be a poem again, let my modiste do her utmost. I don't want to be indiscreet, but I presume you find Montague all you wish?"

"Kindness itself. He consults me about everything. After my former experience, you may suppose what a charm such deference has for me," and Cissy experienced a vague feeling of annoyance. What business had Mrs. Paynter to call her husband by his Christian name?

If she had reflected, she would have remembered that Lizzie was rather addicted to speak of her male acquaintance in this fashion.

"Yes, he was always perfect in that way. He didn't affect society very much, but Montie Gore was always courtesy itself, when he had to deal with our sex," replied Mrs. Paynter, musingly.

Cissy was no whit better pleased by this remark. She did not care to hear historiettes of her husband's courtesy to others before she knew him. Again, his Christian

name was her property now, to be shared only with authentic relations. What right had Mrs. Paynter to use this diminutive, — a thing she had never as yet allowed herself to do?

"You will have to bring him out, my dear," exclaimed Lizzie, enthusiastically. "If he has shirked society thus far the loss has been society's. He can talk brilliantly, when he chooses. I know no one I would rather be taken down to dinner by than your husband. He was always adamant till he met you. Impervious to our smiles, but pleasant."

She was literally hardly conscious of it, but there floated into Cissy's mind, as her visitor spoke, the misty thought, — had Lizzie Paynter ever tried the effects of her charms upon this husband of hers? The thought was so vague, so indefinite, that if you had taxed Cissy with it at the moment she would have given it unqualified denial. A mere germ; but such germs, by force of circumstances, sometimes flourish and bear fruit; at others, nothing assisting them, they perish in the mind which gave them birth.

"You have known Montague for some years, I suppose?" inquired Cissy, carelessly.

"Yes, I really forget how long exactly; but we certainly are old acquaintance now, — old friends, I hope I may say. But I am forgetting part of my mission. If you have nothing else to do, will you come and eat your dinner with us to-morrow? You are both great favorites of John's, and I was told specially to catch you, if I could."

"We shall be delighted."

"No party, you know; a stray man or two, perhaps, if I happen to come across any that are pleasant. But, between you and me, my dear, that's not an every-day occurrence, so there will, very likely, be only our four selves."

"And a very merry quartette we shall be, no doubt," cried Cissy, gayly.

"Of course we shall. *Tête-à-tête* dinners are all very well, but one requires a little change sometimes, though you mustn't admit it as yet. Good-by." And, with a laughing little nod, Mrs. Paynter took her departure.

Apparently that lady's wanderings had been unsuccessful, for the next night saw her dining-table laid for four. But when her husband returned, just in time to dress, he dashed into his wife's room, and exclaimed: —

"Asked a fellow to dinner, Lizzie; just send word to 'em to lay another plate, will you?"

"You shall be obeyed, my lord," replied Mrs. Paynter, as she turned to give the necessary instructions to her maid. "Who is it, John?"

"Only Brine, — the fellow we met at Gore's wedding, you know. I ran against him to-day, and he said he hadn't seen them since they came back; didn't know they were back, in fact; so I said he had better come and meet them here to-night."

"I am sorry you asked him here," replied his wife, slowly.

"Why? He's a friend of Montague's. If he didn't admire that costume as much as he ought, it's hardly sufficient reason for objecting to him," rejoined her husband, laughing.

"It is a very good and sufficient reason, sir," said Mrs. Paynter. "To have over looked that dress showed a want of sense of the beautiful. He must be a gross, material, male creature. No, stop one moment, John. Listen; I have been improving my mind lately. I have been reading; and this is what one of our greatest writers says: 'Dress is so essential a thing in the mind of a woman that no man who cares about women ought to disdain critical study of it.'"

"Well, my dear, it's getting high time you attended to it, or you'll not stand criticising to-night. I'm off."

"As a man always is when he gets the worst of an argument," cried Lizzie.

But John Paynter detested cold soup, and vanished. He understood his wife well, and she was right when she said no one else did. Lizzie had better stuff in her than the world gave her credit for.

It was a very merry dinner that. Those little dinners are so charming,—where the ball of conversation is kicked around, and all the table are players,—and, moreover, fair players; where intimacy exists among the *convives* and there is no noted talker to oppress their spirits. I have always thought one of the funniest things ever beheld must have been the meeting of those two famous professors of the monologue, Madame de Stael and Coleridge; according to tradition it was like a two-year old race at Newmarket. The poet jumped off with the lead, and the lady never was in it. She never could get a word in. I suppose it all depended upon who spoke first; and madame, as a lady, must have had the choice of taking the initiative. I don't believe she ever forgave herself for the mistake; and it is pretty evident that she never felt friendly to Coleridge afterwards.

"And the first lion thought the last a bore,"

is a burlesque line, with much meaning in it.

But Lizzie bends her head to Mrs. Gore, and the ladies rise. She stops for a second as she passes her husband, and whispers in his ear, "Well, sir, am I not fit to be looked at now?" then, before he could reply, she exclaimed aloud, "Now, gentlemen, don't sit all night over your wine. I'm going to be Bohemian to-night, and let you light cigars in my drawing-room. Have coffee there, John?"

"Of course; order it in half an hour, and tell Bindon to let us know."

"Deuced glad to meet you, to-night, Fox," said Gore, as the ladies left the room. "I was coming down to see you to-morrow, if I hadn't run against you so providentially. An inspiration of yours, Paynter, asking him here. The fact is, I want you to go down to Nottingham for me. I am so far in arrears with work myself, that I cannot spare the time. You've nothing particular to do, have you?"

"Well, I'm busy. I don't mean but what it could stand over a bit," returned Brine. "Still, I have got a plot of a three-volume novel on the stocks that I think will be a success. I haven't quite worked it out yet, but I have got it pretty clearly, and was going at it this next fortnight."

"If you've really started to write, I've no more to say. I know what interrupting a literary man is, when he has regularly collared his subject."

"No, I've not exactly begun. I've just mapped out the first volume. I can't say I've fairly laid down to it. Rather a good idea, Montie, though; I'll just tell it to you. I should like to know what you fellows think of it. A man marries in life, and his widow—"

"Halloa! stop! what becomes of the man?"

"How should I know? Dies, of course; cholera, railroads, anything. Petty details are the sin of small novelists. Well, his widow marries again. He has a child, and she has a child."

"They had two children is the usual way of expressing it," remarked Gore.

"What a fool you are! Of course, her child is by the first marriage, and his also."

"But we know nothing about him."

"How should you? You're not intended to till the end of the second volume."

"But oughtn't we to know about his previous marriage?" inquired John Paynter.

"God bless my soul, no; everything depends upon your being kept in ignorance of that. Well, the boy and girl, being brought up with no knowledge of each other, fall in love."

"But how the deuce are they to fall in love if they've no knowledge of each other?" demanded Gore.

"Really," remarked Brine, with the utmost serenity, "it is hopeless to explain the salient points of a plot to two fellows like you. I volunteer a sketch, and you demand a photograph. They've no knowledge of their connectionship, of course. Well, just as things are getting unpleasant all round, the rejected lover, who has made a large fortune in America, turns up."

"But we've never heard of him as yet," exclaims Gore.

"Of course you haven't. How could you? He doesn't appear till this stage of the story. One would think you expected to find it all in the preface. Real art, sir, is to spring your effects like a mine."

"How did he make his fortune?" asked John Paynter, sententiously.

"There you go again! details, details, always details. Men who paint landscapes don't paint miniatures. The best likenesses of Oliver Cromwell were not those which particularized his warts. How should I know how he made his wealth? Went gold-digging, or pig-sticking, or something. I tell you he made his fortune."

"I give in," returned Gore, laughing. "Go on, Fox."

"Oh, it's no use going on," replied that gentleman. "If you're not in the profession you can't understand these things. Any fellow that wrote would comprehend it all in a second. Never mind. Now, Montie, let's have your plot, or hear what you want done. Do you wish me to once more interview the peripatetic Turbottle? He is the great fact left in my mind connected with Nottingham."

"No, never mind him. But you know I told you some time back that I had a

tangled skein to unravel. I want to find the relatives of a certain Mark Hemsworth; and I fancy, from what I hear, that they are to be discovered in Nottinghamshire."

"Why, that was your wife's name," said Brine.

"Yes; and it's her late husband's family I want to get hold of. I have a strong belief that she had a marriage-settlement, though as yet I have found neither the deed nor the trustees. Now her father, who has vanished altogether, is probably one; but search for him seems hopeless. One has no idea where to begin, supposing that he is still alive. But the other trustee might perhaps be one of the Hemsworth people; or, at all events, they might know something concerning the affair. If I am right in my conjecture, the settlement, if settlement there were, was on property in this country, and I'll tell you why." And then Gore related to his companions the slender data upon which he had founded his conclusion.

Brine listened attentively, and when the narrator finished, exclaimed: —

"I'll go in for this, Montie. I think doing detective will be rather good fun, and ought to lead to some striking situations."

"Such as being pitched out of windows," chimed in John Paynter.

"You have no taste for dramatic art, sir," rejoined Brine, "or you wouldn't imagine that I could lend myself to such a coarse farcical incident."

"Tell us whether you think it farcical when you get to the bottom," grinned Mr. Paynter.

"You don't understand the natural tact with which your obedient servant is gifted," continued Brine, scarce heeding the interruption. "I'll cross-examine Nottinghamshire as if I was a revising barrister. Montie, my boy, I have acted in the 'Scrap of Paper.' We'll make a glorious drama out of this note-book incident. Superb, by Jove! I feel it simmering in my brain already. It will haunt my pillow. Consider the thing done. I'll find a dozen Hemsworths, and the difficulty shall be to discover which is the right one. Don't you think that would be a point, eh?"

"If you'd think of my wife's interests, and not of an imaginary drama, I should call it a point," rejoined Gore.

"Of course," said the imperturbable Brine. "But Mrs. Gore's interests and the playgoing public's are one upon this occasion. Don't be afraid, Montie, I'm not quite a fool, if I am imaginative. I'll ferret out what you want, and discover Hemsworth's relations, if he has any."

"Well, now let us go upstairs to coffee," said the host.

"At last, Mr. Gore," exclaimed Lizzie, as they entered the drawing-room. "What I should call a very liberal rendering of half an hour. Nonsense! no apology; of course I'm jesting," she continued, as Montague showed symptoms of pleading extenuating circumstances. "I am only too glad you found John's wine decent; you know of old that I like my guests to be happy in their own way, and that the greatest compliment you can pay me is to let me see you've passed a pleasant evening. Now come and talk to me. I want to investigate you in your new character."

"Want to see what a wife's done for me," returned Gore, laughing, as he dropped into an easy-chair next his hostess.

"Light your cigar,—you see John has,—and then you can talk as if you were not married."

Now a quintette is sometimes a very awkward number should the conversation cease to be general, and the party not be all intimates.

Mrs. Paynter's drawing-room was destined to furnish an example of this. The hostess has settled down to a pleasant *tête-à-tête* with Montague Gore. Cissy and John Paynter would probably have done likewise, but Brine, in self-defence, was compelled to make a third in their conversation. He was the discord in that trio. Brine was a thorough man of the world, and could talk fluently on most topics, and yet it would seem as if he had "agreed to disagree" with his two companions about everything. He was wont to be rather dogmatic in his opinions,—a failing always irritating to women, should you differ from them, because they also are generally strongly wedded to their ideas. James Smith used to assert that his politics were always the same as those of the lady he took down to dinner. It is good to modify one's opinions in like manner. Brine was also given to live more amongst men than in general society; a not uncommon result of which is the loss of that habit of deference to their remarks, so much appreciated by all women. Certain it was that Cissy and he conceived a mutual dislike for one another upon this, one may say, their first time of meeting; for, except at her wedding, Brine had never seen his friend's wife. John Paynter, too, was conscious that the talk was somehow spoiled, and not altogether to Mrs. Gore's taste, and characterized Mr. Brine to his wife afterwards as an "argumentative cuss."

That gentleman, as he wended his way leisurely home to the Temple, shook his head, and hoped Montie Gore might not some day think he had better have remained unmarried.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHARLIE DETFIELD'S AFFAIRS.

Belief in himself is one of those things without which a man never achieves anything. "*Il faut se faire valoir*" ought to be inscribed on every young man's banner. It by no means follows that such belief is not misplaced, but it is so much better to hold as a creed than mistrust in one's abilities, that I cannot help thinking conceit to be by no means a bad stock in trade for a man in the commencement of his career. Of course it may be overdone; but the world very soon corrects that fault, while the other,—ah! have we not all seen men's lives marred by that other? As Hazlitt said, "the apprentice who did not think he would one day be Lord Mayor was bound to be hung."

Fox Brine had never achieved anything, but there never was a man who believed more implicitly in himself. He was quite convinced that, whenever he had time to finish off these dramas, or novels, that he conceived with a prolificness utterly bewildering to his friends, he should awake like Byron and find himself famous. But, somehow, he never did find time. It is, perhaps, a little astonishing, but those who succeed in such things always do find time.

Mr. Brine emerges from his bath, radiant as the sun-god, the morning after his dinner at Mrs. Paynter's, ready to write, to argue, to do, or to die. He jots down a few ideas for a buffo song, as he continues his toilet, and is not without an inspiration concerning a prologue for some amateur theatricals, to which he stands pledged; thinks, indeed, he will knock off that prologue after breakfast. He is always going to knock off something after breakfast, but complains that he never can get a minute to himself. Still he feels in the vein this morning, and really an hour will be sufficient to carry out that intention. Meantime some devilled kidneys and an anchovy, followed by the sedative of a pipe, is just the preparation that a man who means work would naturally prescribe for himself.

The meal satisfactorily disposed of, the pipe fairly under way, and Mr. Brine puts out his writing materials. He traces the word prologue in bold, large characters at the top of a sheet, and then sits looking contemplatively at it, smoking placidly while he does so. Somehow, those ideas which came so easily to him in his bath all seem to have evaporated now that he has a pen in his hand.

"Most courteous friends, I make my bow before you —

Hang it, that won't do. It doesn't sound original. Besides, 'bore you' is the only rhyme I can think of just now. Suppose we shall, but it'll never do to tell 'em so to start with. Extraordinary thing, inspiration; I lost the thread while I was peppering that second kidney. To think that a mere kidney might suppress a poem.

"O gracious friends, who grace our play to-night —

'put to flight,' 'bite,' no, that won't do. Very curious; my rhythmical powers are usually of a high order. The fount of song seems dried within me this morning.

"O stalls and boxes, pit and gallery, hail!
We come before you with a favoring gale.

That's startling, if not quite connected.

"Our dramatic craft has got the wind abaft her,
Her sails are bellying out with tears and laughter.

That's a good, bold simile, if they only understand it. Quite Dibdinesque in the turn of expression. The devil of it is, it don't seem to lead to anything. Perhaps, if I took a

turn, ideas would flow again." So saying, Mr. Brine rose from his seat and walked up and down his room a little. Then he stopped, looked out of the window, and became interested in an altercation between a pot-boy and a solicitor's clerk, that was being conducted with considerable asperity in the court-yard below. Having seen this little difference satisfactorily adjusted, Mr. Brine indulged in some comments on the degeneracy of the English race. In his opinion, the clerk ought to have summarily chastised his opponent, — "punched his head," I think was the way Mr. Brine put it to himself.

Then it occurred to him that he might as well knock off that prologue.

> "Laden we are with comedy and farce,
> Yourselves the custom-house we hope to pass."

"Hum!" mused the writer, as he added the above couplet, "if those are not regular prologue lines, I don't know what are. They are neither common-sense nor English, which is always a presumed hit in an amateur's prologue. I don't get on quite so fast as I might, but the composition of high-class poetry involves labor; yes, and now I come to think of it, beer;" with which Mr. Brine winked pleasantly at his inkstand, as if that article, from long experience, could quite enter into the joke, and then proceeded to shout for a myrmidon of some kind down the staircase. That individual at last appearing, and being despatched in search of the required refreshment, Fox Brine began once more to pace his chamber in pursuit of ideas.

Suddenly there was a sharp tap at the door, to which, deeming it to herald the return of the messenger, Brine, without turning his head, briefly answered: —

"Put it down!"

"Down it are," replied Charlie Detfield, flinging himself into an arm-chair.

"Holloa! it's you, is it? By Jove! I'm hard at work, you know."

"Exactly, and getting awfully thirsty over it. I overtook the fellow with the tankard, on the last landing, and it looked so cool, and the stairs so steep, that I drained it to give me strength for the remainder of the ascent."

"You did?" said Brine, surveying his visitor. "If the beer was about half as cool as you, it must have gone down pleasantly."

Charlie nodded.

"Never mind; I sent him back for some more. I've come to have a talk with you."

"Fellows always do directly I sit down to work. I shall have to change my abode, and rent the top of the monument, or the diving-bell at the Polytechnic, or some other retired locality."

"Don't be edgy, Fox; I want to talk over my affairs a bit."

"All right," replied Brine, throwing himself full length on a sofa. "I am at your service, old fellow, to the extent of my abilities all round, you know. But Charlie, we never do make anything out of it, when we talk over your difficulties, beyond the fact that you are dipped past redemption. By the way," he continued, philo-

sophically, "it is very curious, but you never hear a prosperous man anxious to talk over his affairs with a friend. There'd be some comfort, too, in a discussion of that kind."

"Of course you don't," retorted Charlie. "You don't see healthy men wishing to consult doctors; it's when we are ill we unburden ourselves of the history of our infirmities. Impecuniosity is my complaint, and I want advice."

"No, you don't, Charlie, you want money; there's plenty of advice about, if that's any good to you."

"But advice leads to money sometimes. You prescribed for me the other day, you know. Now, it's very odd, but all the friends who are aware of how awfully hard up I am, give me the same advice."

"What,—to marry money?"

"Just so. I didn't take kindly to the idea at first, but desperate causes demand desperate remedies. I have made up my mind."

"Good! you are going in for an heiress," remarked Brine, sententiously. "Now, there's very often a terrible flaw in the advice your friends give you on that point. My prescription, I remember, was deficient in one necessary ingredient. People tell you to marry *an* heiress; that indefinite article is the devil. If they would point out *the* heiress."

"I can't complain on that point. The lady has been indicated. I have been properly introduced. I am making love to her now," rejoined the guardsman, languidly.

"You are?" said Brine, eying him keenly. "If you don't throw a little more steam into talking to her than you do into talking of her, I wouldn't take twenty to one about your chance, my boy."

"We are only in the early stage of courtship at present," replied Charlie, speaking as tranquilly as if he was talking of something in which he had no personal concern. "It would never do to frighten the old lady by being too demonstrative."

"Ah! she's a little old, is she? What do you call old now?"

"Well, you see, I don't know her age exactly. Mrs. Paynter vows she's old enough to be my mother; but that's a libel. You know how women talk. She's a good bit older than me, though."

"Of course, if you go for money, you can't have everything. By the way, I dare say you met Mrs. Gore before her marriage?"

"Yes, two or three times, when she was Mrs. Hemsworth. She was a good deal at the Paynters'."

"What do you think of her, Charlie?"

"I thought her a particularly agreeable, graceful woman. I should fancy Gore a fortunate man in his wife."

"I'm glad you think so. He's a very dear friend of mine. Should have been something nearer, as you, of course, know. But I can't say I did fancy Mrs. Gore

when I met her the other night. However, that's neither here nor there, and I hope I'm all wrong in the opinion I formed of her."

"I haven't a doubt of it. She's as pleasant a woman to talk to as I ever met, and I am not quite sure whether she isn't a very handsome one to boot; I know if ever I thought she wasn't, I always recanted after talking to her for five minutes. Did you ever make out anything about Major Jenkens for me?"

"No," replied Brine, with considerable animation. "The major is dark — very dark. I have talked to a good many people regarding him. That he's a rather shy lot, I've no doubt; but I can't pick up anything tangible about him. There are men who abuse him freely, and hint that he has been guilty of all sorts of enormities; but, when you come to go into particulars, they can only whisper mysterious accounts of his having now and then won goodish stakes at play, and that he is well known to the bill-discounters. Sharp practitioner they call him, but nobody seems able to allege any instance of peculiarly sharp practice on his part. That he's a bird of prey I think probable; but, at all events, he does his ravening decorously. Don't understand his taking such an interest in your marrying, Charlie."

"Nor I. He certainly never lent me money; but, of course, he may be a partner in the transaction. He told me who to go to, but affects to have nothing to do with it. Professes simply to buy and sell on commission anything, — houses, horses, carriages, white elephants, or white mice. You've seen him, I think you said?"

"Yes; two or three times in the park, — the other afternoon only."

"Was he wearing spectacles?" asked Charlie, laughing.

"No, certainly not. Does he sometimes?"

"Yes; and I'd almost bet you a sovereign you wouldn't know him when thus decorated. I never saw a man that it made such a difference to. I don't believe the old villain wants them at all, and when he has got them on I defy you to make anything out of his face."

"It didn't strike me as a face you would make much out of any way," rejoined Brine, meditatively. "But as far as he bears on your affairs there is no more to be said at present. I should like to know something more of this wooing of yours."

"It goes on smoothly and tranquilly. I pay my visits to Barnsbury park whenever I am not on duty or specially engaged."

"And you find you progress favorably with the old — beg pardon, I mean *the* lady?"

"Yes. I assure you she's a very nice person. I like her immensely. Very pleasant to talk to. She suits me admirably in every respect but one."

"And that is?"

"Well, she'd make such a charming aunt or mother-in-law, it seems a pity that necessity compels me to make her a wife. I could get so fond of her from any other point of view. But what must be, must, I suppose."

"You find it rather hard work, I presume, then!" exclaimed Brine, laughing.

"Not at all; as I said before, she is remarkably pleasant. Then the elder sister is

extremely amusing, quite a character; and as for the niece,—Bessie Stanbury is simply charming! You never saw such a sweet girl, Fox. Her figure is perfect, and her eyes simply swim in their own loveliness," concluded Charlie, after a short pause.

"Holloa! I say, this won't do, you know!" exclaimed Brine, springing up from his sofa. "We know perfectly well what the result is in all comedies, when a man makes love to the aunt, and a bewitching niece appears upon the scene. My dear Charlie, if this is your idea of going in for money, you won't make much of the speculation."

"By Jove! you should see her on horseback, old fellow! She can sit her horse, and never looks better than she does in her riding-habit."

"I have no doubt Miss Bessie Stanbury is all you describe her; but it strikes me you are making a fool of yourself," said Brine, gravely. "Under the delusion that you are laying siege to the aunt, it looks as if you were falling over head and ears in love with the niece. That's not whist, Charlie."

"Pooh! nonsense! I know what I am about," rejoined Detfield, pettishly. "Of course I must talk to the girl when she is present. Besides, it is not forbidden, even when married, to admire a pretty woman when you meet one, much less when you are only going to be."

"If you don't confine your admiration to the woman you seek to marry, it's odds she is never your bride, Master Charlie. You don't suppose the aunt will approve of your making sheep's eyes at the niece, do you? and you can't be such a fool as to suppose a woman will overlook *that?*"

"Never you mind, Fox," replied Detfield, lazily. "It's no use your preaching. Depend upon it, if a man can't manage to win a woman himself, no male creature can teach him the trick of it. Besides, Miles Standish always made a great impression on me. I determined long ago never to ask masculine help in my wooing. It's awkward when the lady makes response to such assistance with 'Why don't you speak for yourself, John?' You leave me to manage my own affairs."

"Why, you ungrateful beggar!" exclaimed Brine, bursting into a roar of laughter. "That's the way of the world all over. You come here bothering for advice, and wind up by requesting I'll leave you to manage your own affairs. It's too absurd."

"So it is," replied Charlie, joining in the laugh against himself, "and we have arrived at the old conclusion, as you said we should, to wit, 'that I am past redemption;' further than that we never get. I tell you what, old fellow, the luxury of talking 'em over with a sympathetic friend is just the one pull of being in difficulties."

"Hear him!" cried Brine. "The serene philosophy of a virtuous nature that—

One o'clock, by Jove! I must put up my traps. I'm off to Nottingham this afternoon on business."

"Pack away," observed Charlie, placidly. "I'll look on."

Brine's arrangements were soon made, and the myrmidon despatched for a cab. As the two friends shook hands, Brine paused for a moment, and then said: —

"This is not advice, Charlie, but prophecy. Mark me, you'll marry the wrong lady."

"What, of those two?"

"Of those two. Of course, I speak with regard to your difficulties."

"Exactly. I'll bet you five pounds I don't."

"Done!" replied Brine; and his good-by was lost in the rattle of the hansom's wheels.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHOM DOES HE COME TO SEE?

CHARLIE DETFIELD, as may be easily surmised, has paid a good many visits to Barnsbury park lately. He has, moreover, contrived to meet Bessie on several occasions in her rides, and has substituted a neat hack for the unfortunate bicycle, — his "first attempt at economy," as he observes, pathetically, "crushed beneath the wheels of the people's Juggernaut." Miss Bessie, who detests street cars, instigated thereto in some measure by Velvet's disdain of those vehicles, vows that expression is most poetical. But that young lady is scarce to be counted a fair judge of Charlie Detfield's sayings and doings just now. She has met him, too, at more than one dinner and dance, contrived by the sagacious Robxy with a view of throwing the young couple together. Charlie no longer despises invitations beyond that famous outpost, "the Angel."

"It is his duty to continue his pursuit of Aunt Clem," he says to himself. "That Bessie should always figure at these entertainments under her wing is a coincidence. Coincidences have considerable effect on our lives, but people never realize nor dream how they themselves contribute to coincidences."

Although Detfield invariably paid Aunt Clem great attention, it cannot be supposed that Bessie attached much significance to that. What tact he had, she thought, thus to propitiate her chaperone; and Miss Clementina, pleased as she was at the studied courtesies of the young guardsman, only considered them an indirect tribute to her pretty niece.

If Aunt Clem did not consider that her dancing days were over, and that matrimonial chances were not as yet altogether beyond her attainment, still she had never pictured a man of Charlie Detfield's years as an aspirant to her hand. If the elder Misses Stanbury were not so rich as their niece, yet they had a comfortable ten thou-

sand pounds apiece; and Aunt Clem did know that there were middle-aged men who would consider that and a good-natured woman of her years a most desirable acquisition.

But Captain Detfield's frequent visits began to attract the attention of Miss Matilda. She liked the young guardsman, dropping in with his light, lively gossip. He always paid her a deference, which impressed her very favorably towards him. Suddenly the idea flashed across Miss Matilda: —

"What does he mean by all this continuous calling? Young gentlemen of his age don't come twice a week or so to see a lady of my years, be she ever so lively." And Aunt Matilda considered that she *could* talk, although such frivolous conversation as held sway when Charlie Detfield was in the drawing-room was rather beneath her. "Now, which was it, — that giddy-minded sister of hers, or the child, that was the attraction?" Miss Matilda always regarded Aunt Clem as a flighty woman, who ought to be slightly ashamed of herself for her caprices; not too old to marry, by any means, but who ought really to think of giving up dancing, and so on. As for Bessie, she persistently looked upon her as a girl too young for any man to think seriously about; but she had observed, she thought, a levity about Captain Detfield that made it just possible he might be amusing himself by flirting with the child.

Miss Matilda conceived that it was her duty to clear up all doubts on the subject forthwith.

"The sooner the better," she said to herself. "Unpleasantness, if it's going to be unpleasantness, like meat in hot weather, gets very, very unpleasant the longer you keep it."

At five-o'clock tea that day she opened her battery.

"Young women," she observed, — "though to call a chit like you a young woman, Bessie, is a moral absurdity, — I want to know who it is that Captain Detfield comes here to see."

"I suppose all of us," replied Aunt Clem, laughing. "Give me some more sugar, Bessie."

"Do you? Then I regret to say, Clementina, you're a fool. He doesn't come here to see ME."

"You're not polite; and you are not all of us," rejoined Aunt Clem, flushing slightly.

"You think he comes to see you, then?" inquired Miss Matilda, sharply.

"I have never thought at all about it, and most assuredly never that," returned Miss Clementina.

If her aunt had flushed Bessie Stanbury had felt that she was becoming scarlet all over at Miss Matilda's abrupt interrogatories. But the youngest women are cunning of fence, when you touch upon their affections. She turned her head after a second or two, and said, demurely, — the little hypocrite! —

"Well, Aunt Clem, I think you ought to take this into consideration. He *does* pay you a deal of attention, you know."

There was a merry twinkle in Miss Clementina's eyes, as she replied, with great solemnity: —

"Now I reflect upon it, he does. Matilda is convinced that she is not the attraction. Bessie seems to think I am. I suppose, then, I am the one that he comes to see."

"Good heavens! Clementina, and, thinking that, what do you mean to do?" inquired Miss Matilda, breathlessly.

"It is a very difficult question to answer. I really don't know. I should like to know what you both think; for at present nothing occurs to me beyond being always glad to see him; and, terrible to confess though it may be, I am."

"What! — you think of marrying that boy?" shrieked Miss Matilda.

"He's not a boy exactly," observed Bessie, laughing.

"And, oh, dear! he hasn't asked me yet," exclaimed Miss Clementina, with an arch glance at Bessie. "Do you think he will?"

"Yes, I do," retorted that young lady. "And he won't take 'No' for an answer, Aunt Clem; and you'll not give him 'No' to take, — that's another thing. And mind, I will be a bridesmaid."

"You won't, my dear," cried Aunt Clem, throwing herself back in her chair, and indulging in a peal of laughter.

"Clementina, your conduct is positively indecent," said Miss Matilda, drawing herself up in her most stately manner; and how stately she could be, when irritated, was scarcely to be conceived. Nothing ever did exasperate the good lady so much as a dim idea that a joke was being carried on at her expense.

"What!" replied Miss Clementina, recovering her gravity; "because I am reflecting what answer I am to give to an important question?"

"It must be entirely your own fault if a boy like that presumes to ask such a question," retorted Miss Stanbury, sniffing with indignation.

Aunt Clem stole a sly look at her niece as she said: —

"But young men in these days are so presuming, — are they not, Bessie?"

"It's not much to be wondered at, when the girls are so forward. When I came out — don't laugh, you chit! Do you suppose I was born two-and-forty? — young men paid us attention; but I see the young ladies of the present day have reversed all that. I'm sure at our dance I saw two or three young women who had put themselves in their partner's place on that score. I suppose next I shall find that you and Bessie are paying attention to somebody or other."

"Aunt! aunt! what a shameful libel!" cried the girl. "You have no right to heap up fresh charges without any foundation, in this manner."

"Thank you for the hint," replied Miss Stanbury, dryly; "we *have* rather wandered from the point. The question is, whom Captain Detfield comes here specially to see. He doesn't come to see me, and, much as I regret to wound Clementina's vanity, I'm not altogether clear that it's her."

Bessie repented her interference, and hung out palpable signals of distress at this unexpected change of Miss Stanbury's views. That lady, though she had been

carried away for the moment, was much too shrewd to be long deceived by her niece's joke. She was indignant at the presumption of the pair in attempting to mystify her for a moment, and disposed to punish the delinquents, for one of whom, at all events, she had a rod ready to her hand.

"Pray," she continued, turning abruptly to her niece, "whom do you suppose to be the loadstone that attracts Captain Detfield to Barnsbury park, eh, miss?"

But Aunt Clem came gallantly to the rescue, and took the answer to that question upon herself.

"My dear Matilda, she has told you already that I am the loadstone. Goodness! I thought we settled that some time back. The question was, what was I to say to my admirer if he ventured to propose."

"The question rather is, what you can have said to induce him to take such a liberty," retorted Miss Stanbury, so fiercely that her sister began to think that the joke had been carried a little too far.

"Don't be angry, Matilda," rejoined Aunt Clem, in pleading tones. "Let us suppose it is Bessie."

"No, pray don't," exclaimed the girl, blushing. "You have no right to suppose so. I have no right to think so. Captain Detfield has said no word to me as yet that would justify me in such belief. Don't be cruel, Aunt Matilda," continued Bessie, springing suddenly from her chair, and coiling herself up at her aunt's feet. "You never tease me, you know, and you are doing so now. It's not fair. I don't like it, and," she added, as she fondled Miss Stanbury's hand, looking up into her face with a mutinous pout, "I won't bear it."

Miss Matilda's face softened, as she stroked the girl's shining tresses.

"There's plenty of love made that's unspoken, my dear," she replied, after a short pause. "And young ladies, for the most part, bear it very patiently, even when it is, although it may be by the wrong man. None of our sex ever were, or ever will be, indifferent to a love-tale, even though our sympathies should not be with the teller. Bessie, my pet, I think you will tell your old aunt when the right man speaks, be he who he may. Now run away, child; I want to talk to Clementina, and not to you."

Bessie's sole reply was to give her aunt a great hug, two or three kisses, leave a tear on her cheek, and vanish.

But if Miss Stanbury had melted momentarily to her niece, it was not to be supposed that austere lady was altogether pacified. Ashamed a little at her own momentary weakness to Bessie, she resolved to give away to nothing of the kind with her sister.

"Well, Clementina," she remarked, with the sharpness of a detonating pistol, as the door closed; "what have you got to say?"

"Nothing," replied Aunt Clem, meekly.

"Nothing? And you have allowed this to go on under your eyes all the time, and tell me you've nothing to say. Here's Bessie as good as engaged. Pooh! don't tell me," she cried, as Aunt Clem made a deprecatory gesture; "when a girl blushes, as

she did just now, at the man's name, he's only to ask and to have, did he but know it. It's to be hoped he don't. Now we know literally nothing of this Captain Detfield. Military morals I believe to be of the most unsatisfactory description. Officers, usually, I have heard, are addicted to all manner of unrighteousness. I don't profess to know much about them, but I have no reason to think that the Household Brigade, to which Captain Detfield says he belongs, are more piously brought up than the other, — horse, foot, or artillery."

And, having so said, Miss Stanbury sat bold upright and glared defiantly at her unfortunate sister. She was speaking the exact truth concerning the army, according to her own lights. She did know nothing about them, and looked upon them all as wine-bibbers, etc.

Miss Clementina bore her sister's attack in silence. That Detfield admired her niece, and paid her considerable attention, she was aware; but that anything serious was likely to come of it had never before entered her head. She felt dreadfully guilty, as if she had neglected a trust confided to her care. They did know next to nothing of Captain Detfield; it was too true. Again, was Bessie's heart out of her own keeping already, as Miss Matilda asserted? She began to fear it was so.

"I can't help it," she murmured at length. "I never thought of his caring for Bessie, in that way, and I couldn't inquire into the history of every man who asked the child to dance, or handed her down to dinner."

"But when you saw her perpetually dancing with one young man, I presume you might have made inquiries about him."

"I'm sure I don't know who from. I declare I don't know who to ask about him now. I haven't the least idea of how to make inquiries about Captain Detfield! I can think of nothing but writing to the colonel of his regiment, and I don't suppose that would do," rejoined Aunt Clem, somewhat dolefully. "Besides, he dances a good deal with me."

"I dare say. If you observe, you will notice young men usually are very attentive to their intended mothers-in-law," retorted Miss Stanbury, spitefully.

But flesh and blood could not stand this innuendo. Aunt Clem started to her feet, and with flushed cheeks exclaimed: —

"I'll not stay here to be insulted, Matilda. I suppose it's not too late to make inquiries about Captain Detfield, even now. Besides, you began by asking whom he comes here to see."

"True. Sit down, Clementina, and let's talk the thing over quietly," interposed Miss Stanbury, who saw that she had gone too far. "We must get somebody to ascertain all about Captain Detfield's family and prospects for us. Bessie's guardian is, of course, the proper person. I shall send for Mr. Roxby."

"Yes, that will do nicely," replied Miss Clementina, much mollified; "but there's a wide distinction between aunts and mothers-in-law, I'd have you to know. I never saw a young man dancing with his mother-in-law, though, perhaps, you may;" and

so saying, Aunt Clem swept out of the room, with a dignified rustle of her skirts most unusual.

Miss Stanbury made no reply, but could not refrain from indulging in a grim smile as she saw how her shot had told. Verily, it was the old *habet* of the arena.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A FATAL KISS.

Cissy has made her appointment, and the morning has arrived on which she is to keep it. That she is fluttered and excited about this meeting is only natural. She has never known a soul in whom she could place implicit reliance, from the time her father so mysteriously vanished, until she married Montague Gore. She is just beginning to think she can do so in him; to feel that his presence is a protection from all ills in this world. She murmurs to herself at times, "I feel so safe now Montague has charge of me. If I did get into a scrape he would pull me through it." It is an immense thing for a woman, who has known what it is to want a protector, to find herself once more in safe anchorage. To feel that there is some one to take care of her; some one on whom she can thoroughly depend. He may not inspire any feeling of love, but he must of esteem and gratitude; and these Cissy had most thoroughly conceived for her husband.

True, Mrs. Paynter had been a great friend to her,—really the one friend of her own sex she had ever known; but no woman can ever stand to another in the light of a protector, even though she be her own mother. It is the prerogative of man, although there is a section of sexless women who apparently do not think so. That third sex, "the Lady Mary Montagues," has always existed; but I think they must have been pleasanter in the days gone by than they are in the present, if one may judge by their recorded sayings and doings.

Cissy has selected Montague square for her interview. She does not know anything about it, further than that it appears to her to be always deserted. There are certain spots in London which one might almost presume to be uninhabited. Montague square is one of these. The dwellers therein seem to leave and regain their homes in stealthy and mysterious fashion, and are never seen to take exercise in their own square. Cissy has merely noticed that it appeared to be a quiet place; that it had the advantage of being near her own home. She has no thought concerning herself in this respect, but she does look upon it that her father must have strong reasons for not wishing to be recognized, though what those reasons may be still puzzles her considerably. She did not understand his note on that point one iota. At the bottom of her heart she thought he had been very cruel to leave her all these years. How many times she had wanted him, he could never know. But her belief in him was unbounded, and he doubtless had good cause for his apparent desertion.

Her husband has gone off to his chambers, and Cissy sallies forth to her appointment, arrayed in the latest Parisian mode, — one of those women with whom to dress well is as a thing of course. Like Marie Stuart, Cissy would have been dressed becomingly if treading the path to the scaffold. She understood economy little in any shape, but as regards her personal attire, not at all. She had always been taught not only to be well-dressed, but strikingly well-dressed. To accomplish that requires a good deal of money. But Cissy would have conceived her husband infinitely more entitled to find fault with her appearance than with her milliner's bill, — an idea born of her first marriage, but which a husband of more limited income, and with certain scruples as regards exceeding it, might be apt to demur to.

Montague Gore has already had a slight revelation on this point, but Cissy knows well that, sooner or later, she will have to bring accounts for his settlement of this nature that will open his eyes considerably. She does not trouble her head much about it as yet. She does not know whether he will care much when she does. These moderate means that he alludes to are so very vague. Some people call themselves paupers on ten thousand a year; but that a husband must wish his wife to be well-dressed is a fixed fact in Cissy's creed. "Well, that cannot be without some expense," reflects Mrs. Gore. "It is unfortunate, but my style does require good things. Little women can do with cheap materials. I can't."

Mrs. Gore's lesser sisters would have probably felt considerable wrath had they known her sentiments. No woman that lives ever considered herself unfitted for rich attire; but Cissy kept her opinions on dress locked within her own bosom, which, when you have conceived heterodox notions, is undoubtedly the most judicious thing to do. Usually we are anxious to promulgate them; and what very hot water we find ourselves in by so doing!

She arrives at Montague square, and has scarcely traversed one side of it before the well-knit figure she knows so well approaches her. The major has no spectacles on upon this occasion. For, once in a way, the veteran has lost sight of doing what he conceives his duty by his neighbor, and is fairly and honestly entrapped into genuine emotion. Midst the sullen, solitary life of plunder he habitually leads, this is the one soft spot, the one human affection he cherishes. For Cissy he has made the one stupendous sacrifice of his life. For her he has triumphed over that innate selfishness, characteristic of love of all kinds. She thinks he was cruel to desert her. She little knows what it cost him; how long he wavered and pondered over this, to him, terrible step, before he determined upon it. "But no," he thought at length, "she is well and fairly launched upon the world; she shall not have a questionable father flying in her face." None knew better than Major Jenkens how quietly but bitterly society can allude to doubtful relations or antecedents.

But they have met, and the major, clasping Cissy's two hands in his own, gazes anxiously into her face, as he exclaims: —

"I see you once more, my darling! Well, happy, — is it so?"

"Why did you leave me, father, all these years? What had your child done that

you should treat her so cruelly? No," she continued, hurriedly, noticing the troubled expression of his face, "I don't mean that exactly. Of course you had good reasons; but it came hard, you know, on me. I knew nothing."

"No, nor I either, Cissy," he replied, hoarsely. "I never guessed I had married you to a blackguard. Nay, don't interrupt," he went on, as his daughter made a slight deprecatory gesture. "I don't want to pain you by abuse of Mark Hemsworth. You know what he was as well as I do."

"He was my husband," interposed Cissy, gently.

"True; we'll allude to him no more," replied the major, as they passed slowly along the pavement. "First, I want to know whether you are happy in this second marriage. Is Gore kind to you, child?"

"Yes, and more than that, considerate. I am his wife. I was Mark Hemsworth's plaything. Ah! there is such a difference. He loves me so, it is a shame I cannot care more for him. I suppose it is not in my nature. Books tell me that women love once at least, but I don't think that hour will come to me; at least, not as I have pictured it to myself. I like him, I esteem him, but," said Cissy, dropping her voice, "I sometimes wish he would never kiss me."

"But why, child? — there is surely nothing repulsive in the kiss of one we only like."

"I can't tell you," she replied, blushing, "further than I feel I have no answering kiss to give him back. I was honest with him, father; I told him I had but liking to give, and he said he could be content to wait till he could win more. I blame myself that he has not done so, but I cannot help it."

"And you were obliged to marry him, of course?"

"Yes; what else could I do? I was grateful to any one who would take care of me. You know I have no choice. I am a lucky woman to have fallen into the hands I have."

"But suppose, Cissy, it should turn out that you have a moderate fortune of your own, — what then?"

"I should be very glad, for my own sake and Montague's. I don't know what his income is, and I don't like to ask him; but I am afraid I am spending more than he will quite like. I know he has an idea that I have a marriage-settlement of some kind from Mark, if he could find out about it; he always said you would be sure to know;" and Cissy looked a little inquisitively into her father's face.

"You have," he rejoined, shortly; "I do know all about it, and it is not gone in the general crash. I took care of you in that respect. It was tied up beyond Mark Hemsworth's control, and is on land in England."

"I am so glad!" cried Cissy; "so pleased to think that Montague will find I have not come to him empty-handed, after all."

The major paused for some few moments before he replied. To have a pull over his fellows was so incorporated with his very nature that it was not in him to relinquish it all at once, even though Cissy might desire it.

"Listen," he said, at length. "You can't suppose that I wish to defraud you of

what is yours. The world calls me hard names, — many because I perceive and take advantage of its weaknesses and selfishness. Unscrupulous is, perhaps, one of the mildest epithets they attach to me. They have good reason. I don't stand at trifles when it is to serve my own ends. I am not likely to flinch when it is to serve your interests. I prefer to keep all knowledge of this property of yours to myself for the present. I mistook Hemsworth; let us wait and see how this new husband of yours turns out."

"I can trust him thoroughly," cried Cissy, proudly, as she reared her head. "He may never win my heart, if I have such a thing; but I believe implicitly in his honor and rectitude. Montague would never ill-treat me, — would scorn to make away with any money of mine."

"My dear," returned the major, dryly, "if you don't love your husband, you are in a very fair way to do so."

"I am nothing of the sort," returned Cissy, with flushed cheeks. "I wish I were. But I can't imagine him doing anything mean."

"No," replied her father, sententiously, "perhaps not. I have lived longer than you, and know what flaws there are in the finest-looking diamonds when tested. You can never quite calculate upon how a man will take getting into difficulties, for instance. Don't think, Cissy, I am insinuating for one instant that your husband is likely to do so. But I prefer to wait a little, and see how you get on together, before I hand over this nest-egg of yours to his control. Remember, it is his to do what he likes with when he only knows of it."

"It shall be as you wish," replied Cissy, "though, I assure you, I have no doubt of Montague. I don't think it is quite fair for an extravagant wife, such as I am to him, to keep back any little property she may be possessed of."

"Ah! he calls you extravagant, eh?" rejoined the major, as he peered curiously into her face.

"Not exactly that; but he did say the other day that there must be bounds to our expenditure."

"And you, no doubt, have a heavy milliner's bill or two that you don't feel quite comfortable about handing over to him?"

"I won't admit that altogether," returned Cissy, half laughing, yet with some increase of color at the same time; "but I do wish they weren't quite so big."

"What! — you have married a miser, then, this time, instead of a spendthrift?" inquired the major, sharply.

"Indeed, I have done nothing of the kind!" cried Cissy, warmly; "but my husband has not so much money as Mark had, nor is he so reckless regarding it."

"You are learning what it is to be without money in your purse, my dear?"

"Well, not exactly; but I am learning to feel the want of it, — that is, I haven't so much to spend as I should like."

"Mrs. Hemsworth could have formed but little ideas of economy," observed the major, musingly.

"Mrs. Hemsworth is dead," replied Cissy, pettishly; "and a very foolish and rather unhappy person she was. I hope Mrs. Gore may be wiser, even though she be a little extravagant. But, father, I want to know why you have abandoned me all these years."

"Humph!" replied the major, as he carefully removed a piece of orange-peel from the pavement with his walking-stick. "I will tell you. I have said they call me hard names, — gambler, adventurer," he continued, bitterly, — "with some amount of truth it may be; but there are more than I, who sit in high places and move among the elect of the land. If you live by your wits, as it is termed, this stigma always attaches itself to you unless you are registered in the 'red book.' My darling," he went on, with a softened voice, "I didn't wish that you should suffer for your father's sins. I had no wish that you should learn to blush when you heard him mentioned, — to dread his appearance in your drawing-room."

"Do you think I could ever do that?" cried Cissy, as she passed her arm through his. "I don't care what you may have done, if it was fifty times worse than anything you have hinted; to me you are still the indulgent father, who humored my every childish whim, who never was unkind till he deserted me. You must never do so again," she added, with a slight sob, raising her moistened eyes to his.

"I think not," replied the major, caressing the hand that laid within his arm, to the evident astonishment of a stray passer-by. "It wasn't altogether a successful experiment last time, my dear, was it? But, Cissy, it is still best I should keep away from you. We can write, meet now and then; but let me still remain unknown to your husband. Believe me it is best so, for the present. You will know always where to find me now. I am close at hand if you want me."

"I shall often want you, father, dear, though not in the way you hint," rejoined Cissy. "I don't anticipate more than a slight lecture from Montague, whatever my offending. But it is hard you will not set foot in my house."

"No, child, no, decidedly not. Don't let me make discord between you and your husband. You must be content to ignore your old father, except troublous times should come upon you. No remonstrances, Cissy; it must be as I say. And now, good-by, dear."

"It shall be as you wish," she returned, meekly. "I suppose you know best; but I think you are wrong, father." And, as she spoke, she lifted her face to receive his kiss.

The major laid his lips lightly on her brow, and then said, once more: —

"Good-by, child. Remember, if the milliners' bills get alarming, I have money, — ay, money of your own, when you choose to ask for it. Now, you had best trot home."

Cissy dropped her veil, pressed his hand, and then walked swiftly away. As she passed out of the square a gentleman half raised his hat to her, but, absorbed in her own thoughts, Mrs. Gore never noticed him. Muttering a slight ejaculation of astonishment, he pushed briskly onwards until he overtook the major, sauntering slowly

towards Oxford street. He honored him with a tolerably comprehensive stare, of which the major, thinking over his interview with his daughter, was quite unconscious.

It was the identical passer-by who had appeared astonished when he had seen the major caressing his daughter's hand; and now his astonishment had changed to a look of troubled anxiety.

"It *was* Mrs. Gore," he muttered, as he strode rapidly down Gloucester place. "The other was Claxby Jenkens; and —! if I didn't see him kiss her, I'll mistrust my eyesight forever. My poor, dear Montie, I never liked the marriage; but I little thought she would play you false before the chime of your wedding-bells had died out of our ears."

Deserted as I have described Montague square to usually be, it may be deemed a curious coincidence that the major and Cissy should be thus recognized. But the wrong person turning up at the wrong time, in the wrong place, is an experience that has happened to most of us.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHARLIE DETFIELD'S WOOING.

CHARLIE DETFIELD has arrived at one of those crises which will occur in the lives of those who live not wisely, but too well. He has been looking forward to it for some months, with the imperturbable *sang-froid* with which he considers it is proper to confront both the ills and pleasures of this world. He has come to those last few days before the inevitable crash, when all attempt at further struggling with destiny seems useless; when a man drifts aimlessly along, wondering what manner of life may be in store for him. There is no particular use in economizing those few resources still remaining, in making the last money we can lay our spendthrift fingers on, go far. It is only a question of weeks. Let the last days of the old life be pleasant, at all events.

True, Charlie has what is not given to every man, — a chance of averting the coming catastrophe. He knows that the announcement of his engagement to a lady with money would cause the rapacious Simmonds to stay his hand, would induce his clamorous creditors to wait, at all events, till they should see what that wedding would do for them. Clearly he must be affianced to Aunt Clem ere many days be over, if he is to save a complete break-up. He has made up his mind that this thing is to be; but he has hitherto been in no hurry to ask the question. Sooth to say, the idea of marrying Miss Clementina has grown much more distasteful of late.

He rejected the first suggestion of setting himself straight by a wealthy marriage with great disdain. He has felt rather a contempt for himself ever since he yielded to the force of circumstances, — to the pressure brought to bear upon him, from more than one quarter, both persuasively and peculiarly. Most especially is he

indignant with Lizzie Paynter, and no one of his advisers is more disinterested than she. It is difficult to make a man believe that the woman who professes to love him would not keep him to herself if she could; that she should prefer his interest before her own love is beyond his comprehension. There is a leaven of vanity and selfishness mingled with this said passion in most of us.

Lovers' quarrels are proverbial; and if you analyze such as fall under your notice you will find one or other of those sentiments at the bottom of them.

But Charlie has determined to take the plunge without more delay. As he makes his way leisurely towards Barnsbury park, this bright June morning, — and never did a man proceed with greater deliberation on his mission, — he smiles bitterly to himself. He is mentally comparing it to that other plunge he made at Epsom, in the hope of relieving himself in some measure from his difficulties; when the judge's fatal adverse verdict of a short head so infinitely more complicated affairs that really admitted of no further complication. When condoled with by his intimates on that disaster, Charlie had rejoined with a phlegm that did credit to his training: —

"It don't matter much. If it had come off it would have been only out-door relief for a time, — the workhouse just as inevitable a little later, as now, you know."

Then — curious subject for a man to pursue on his way to propose for another lady — he begins to think of Bessie. He muses over her bright face, over the soft brown eyes that are wont to fall beneath his own, over the girl's frank, graceful manner. "How very nice she is!" he thinks; "so utterly unspoilt by the stagey conventionalities of society. She don't bore one with skating, princes, Hurlingham, or the opera. Yes, a little enthusiastic about the last, perhaps; but in such a different manner from the usual clap-trap. By Jove!" ejaculates Charlie, sententiously, "if I were a little younger I'll be shot if I couldn't make a fool of myself, as Brine hinted, and fall downright in love with that girl. Yes, more in love a good deal than I ever did yet. Bah! you idiot! what have you to do with Aphrodite and her worship? What you want is, —

"'A father-in-law so wealthy and grand
He could give checkmate to Coutts in the Strand,
So, along with a ring and posy,
He endows the bride with Golconda offhand,
And gives the groom Potosi.'

"Yes," he continued, in jeering fashion to himself, travestying the golden poet: —

"'Gold, still gold, it haunts him yet,
At the 'Golden Lion' he's always met,
A-tasting of golden sherries.'

"I shouldn't wonder if that's what comes to me of taking a golden wife. What a thundering mean fool I feel just now, and how jolly miserable for a man who is about

to ask a woman to make him happy for life! I wonder whether she'll have Bessie to stay with her when we are married. If I was a mature bride, I'd have no pretty nieces about the premises,—no, nor yet maids. Well, I think I'm decked for the sacrifice;" and Charlie cast a glance at the flower in his button-hole. "Next time I tread these stones I suppose it will be as 'Benedict the married man.'"

That Aunt Clem might say him nay, you see, never entered this young coxcomb's head; and yet Charlie Detfield had certainly no more conceit than the generality of men of his age and station. But he held a creed common enough among men of the world, to wit, that at the critical time of life at which Aunt Clem had arrived, an unmarried woman is rather solicitous on the subject of marriage. She feels her chances are slipping rapidly away from her, and that to say No now is, perchance, to have said No forever. Although she may have seen many of her sisters marry much later in life, she regards them as rather exceptional cases. Widows, of course, are like comets, as baffling to the social philosopher in his observations as the latter to the astronomer. They abandon their weeds within a few weeks; they adhere firmly to them for years, spite of earnest solicitation to the contrary. They are women with experiences; past masters, likely to know more of connubial bliss than those who would have them attempt it once more.

But by this time, in spite of all his deliberation, Charlie has arrived at Barnsbury park. No nervous old lady could have taken such care of herself about the crossings as he has done. A cab, two hundred yards off, and coming at a snail's gallop, a veritable "crawler," was enough to make that active guardsman pause before risking his precious neck.

Never upon any previous occasion had he been so struck with the contents of the shop-windows; and if those in St. John's street road can prove attractive, verily, a man must be easy to amuse. But though you may count the flagstones, and be particular about not putting your feet upon their joinings, you must arrive at last at your destination. We all know these terrible journeys to achieve interviews we would fain avoid; that jerk at the bell, or nervous rattle of the knocker, which reminds one so vividly of the tug at the string in a February shower-bath. Well for us if we come out in the healthy glow with which that formidable tonic is supposed to endue us. Charlie has pulled his string, that is, bell, and is conscious of icy sensations down the spinal marrow. But he has wavered no jot in his intention. He means to come out of that house Miss Clementina Stanbury's accepted lover, unless all opportunity of asking her consent to that arrangement be denied him.

The portly man-servant answers in the affirmative to his inquiries for the Misses Stanbury, ushers him upstairs, and pompously announces him. For a second he thinks the room is empty; then he becomes aware of a cloud of diaphanous draperies in the recess of the window, and Bessie rises to greet him.

"Yes, she is all alone," she says, the blood rushing to her conscious cheek, as she recalls that conversation of a day or two back, as to who it was that her visitor came

there to see. "Aunt Matilda is keeping her room for a slight attack of neuralgia, and Aunt Clem is out, but she will be in before long, no doubt."

Charlie settles himself comfortably in an easy-chair, and is properly sympathetic about Miss Stanbury's neuralgia. Of course, he must await Miss Clementina's return. He has a duty to perform (I am afraid he regards it rather in that light), and cannot postpone the performing of it longer, as he well knows. In the mean time it will be very pleasant to have a long, lazy talk with Bessie.

"How is Velvet?" he inquired, smiling; "I think she is the only one of the family, now, that I have not asked after."

"Oh, Velvet is very well, almost too well," replied Bessie; "she hasn't had half enough work lately, and gave herself airs in consequence, yesterday."

"What, misbehaved?"

"No, not that. Don't you know, Captain Detfield, that Velvet is like her mistress, and never misbehaves; but she was, what shall I say, rather uppish."

"I see, danced a good deal, and hinted at kicking and rearing."

"Just so, but it's quite make-believe on her part. She never ventures to so really misconduct herself as that. She's a bit of a coquette, I think, and institutes a mock quarrel with me when I don't take her out regularly."

"I, at least, can sympathize with you on that head. What hot water we men get into when we neglect our social duties!"

"Then you shouldn't neglect them. Of course, we consider it bad manners and bad taste when you don't come to see us," returned Bessie, demurely.

"But I plead not guilty, at least as far as Barnsbury park is concerned. You make, I mean you all make, the house too pleasant to allow one to keep away."

The girl's color rose a little, as with a gay laugh, she retorted, —

"Barnsbury park feels honored by Captain Detfield's preference."

She did not quite approve of that "all," — she had marked the correction. She could not guess that her visitor was trying to persuade himself that he had no predilection, at all events. If he did not feel quite so interested in Miss Clementina, as a man should who had come to ask her consent in marriage, still Charlie did not wish to acknowledge an undue interest in any one else.

"By the way, Captain Detfield, do you recollect Minnie Rendleshaw, — the pretty girl in blue, I introduced you to the other night?"

"Yes," returned Charlie; "against succumbing to whose attractions you warned me so impressively."

"Just so! and very much obliged to me you ought to be. What might your feelings have been at learning she's the bride of another?" and Bessie indulged in a mock melo-dramatic start, as she made the announcement.

"Can't possibly say what agony it might have occasioned. As it is, I'm tranquil. I couldn't feel calmer if I were iced."

"Well, I am not; I feel quite angry about it. Minnie really is a nice girl, and to

think that she is going to throw herself away on that old, ugly, disagreeable Mr. Mobbles is simply disgusting."

"I presume Mobbles is possessed of some latent attractions not perceptible to most of us," replied Charlie, languidly.

"Oh, she takes him for his money, of course. He's rich as Crœsus, you know. But she ought to be ashamed of selling herself in that fashion;" and Bessie threw herself back in her chair, with the prettiest possible pout of indignation.

Detfield's face flushed slightly; it is not pleasant to hear the parallel of one's own contemplated line of conduct commented on disdainfully.

"I suppose," he said at length, "these arrangements are necessary in our social system. You can't have everything. Miss Rendleshaw hankers doubtless for dresses, jewels, carriages, etc., and she takes a man who can give her them."

"As if a girl worth taking couldn't do without all those things, sooner than marry a man she did not love."

"I don't know about whether she could," rejoined Charlie, slowly. "As far as my experience goes, there isn't much disposition to try the experiment."

"For shame, Captain Detfield, I don't believe a word of it!" cried Bessie, her eyes flashing with indignation. "Cases like Minnie's are the exception, not the rule."

"When you have lived in the world a little longer, you will change your opinion," observed Charlie, sententiously.

"I hope not. I trust not," replied the girl, in quick, earnest tones. "Of course one expects to encounter meanness and selfishness sometimes; but I shall be very sorry if ever I should come to regard them otherwise than as exceptional cases."

She colored slightly as she finished, and her eyes fell beneath her companion's unmistakable gaze of admiration. A violent revulsion had taken place in Detfield's mind during the last few seconds.

"May you carry that faith to your grave," he replied. "And you,—suppose this was your own case, that a man loved you whose own folly had ruined him; who had been mean enough to cherish the idea of repairing his fortunes by a wealthy marriage, but who, at the last moment, was recalled to his better self by the words that have just fallen from your lips."

Bessie's heart stood still. She knew now that she loved this man. Was the fact of her being rich to stand between them, and that, too, from her own foolish speech?

"I don't think you understood me, quite," she murmured, in a low voice.

"I hope so," he continued, earnestly. "Could you make up your mind to wait, Bessie, till this man retrieved his past sufficiently to offer you a home?"

"What could he mean?" she wondered. "Surely he was speaking of himself; asking her to be his wife, yet repudiating a wealthy marriage. Perhaps he didn't call her rich; with those he habitually consorted it might be that such fortune as hers was deemed of small account."

"Won't you answer me, darling?" continued Charlie, in low, pleading tones. "Won't you tell me that you can love and wait for me?"

She was puzzled still; but her heart gave a great leap. He was asking her to be his now, — that was clear.

"Not a word for me yet. Have I made a mistake, or is it that you fear to pledge yourself to a ruined man?"

"O Charlie! Captain Detfield! — you know," cried Bessie.

Apparently he did, for he drew her to himself and kissed her, and, as she buried her blushing face in his waistcoat, whispered into her ear: —

"Mine, are you not?"

A little tremulous "Yes" was the sole reply.

As a rule, I fancy there is not much said upon these occasions; at all events, nowadays. When George the Third was king, perhaps it was different. Did the lovers of those times preface the momentous question with a couple of pages of compliment and commonplace like Richardson's heroes? I suppose they *did kneel*. I wonder whether any one ever does now. A proposal I should imagine, in the "good old times," loomed in the future for some months; and the lover and his mistress mutually rehearsed what they would say, when it came about, for weeks previously. Nature, I presume, got the best of the conventionalities here and there. In our high-pressure age we cannot afford to spend so much time about it. We do our courting (I like the dear, old-fashioned word) quicker; and a young gentleman of the nineteenth century is no more nervous about asking a lady for her hand than for her photograph.

"Bessie, my darling," said Detfield, as he released her, "do you quite understand what you have done?"

"I think so," she replied, smiling, — "promised to be your wife."

"Yes, to be wife to a pauper, you understand?"

Bessie nodded, and looked as jubilant as if he had said "millionnaire."

"Wife to a man who has not as yet even a home to offer you."

Again the girl nodded gayly, as she replied: —

"But I hope he will have some day."

"And you don't repent?"

"You don't give me much time, Charlie," she exclaimed, laughing. "When I come to doing the grates, you know, — we shall be so poor, I suppose, that I shall have to do those, — then, perhaps — " she stopped abruptly, blushed, and bowed her head.

"What?" he asked, anxiously.

"I shall thank God that I am married to the man I love best," she continued, proudly, raising her frank, innocent eyes fondly to his.

Bessie was very young, but she might have guessed what the sequel to such a speech was likely to be.

"Well, my own," said Charlie, after one of those brief intervals which will occur in lovers' conversations, not the less interesting to those concerned because the con-

versation has languished, "if you will only wait for me, I will claim you before long."

"I can wait and trust, Charlie," replied the girl, gently.

Remarkable is the confidence induced by this self-same passion called "love." Charlie Detfield knew perfectly well that he was a ruined man, and had almost as much idea of how he was to earn a living in the days to come as he had of solving the problem of perpetual motion; but he no more doubted of his capabilities at this moment than he did of his existence.

"Well, Bessie, it may be as long as two or three years; but we shall see each other and write;" and here nothing further occurring to him to say upon the peculiarly hazy future, he stroked her hair fondly.

But the sharp rattle of the door-handle causes the lovers to spring rapidly apart; and Charlie could not forbear smiling as he rose to greet Aunt Clem, and thought what a mess he had made of his last battle with his destiny. He had come to win a wealthy bride, and stood affianced to a portionless girl. He had never thought much about what Bessie's prospects might be, — dependent on her aunts, he imagined; but had really troubled his head little on the matter.

Although Miss Clementina rattled on carelessly on indifferent topics, she had observed indications noticeable only to a feminine eye, and drawn her own conclusions. Detfield cut his visit from this as short as he decently could, and no sooner had the door closed behind him than she said, quietly: —

"I don't know, Bessie; but I have an idea that you can tell Matilda for certain now who it is that Captain Detfield comes to see in Barnsbury park."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN EMBARRAS DE RICHESSE.

MONTAGUE GORE still nurses his skeleton with all the assiduity that a man habituated to a solitary life is wont to devote to such grim bantlings. Long nights passed in chambers give a man much faculty for this species of self-torture, and he broods over his relations with his wife more than is good for him. Could he but see it, he is in a fair way to gain so much heart as Cissy may possess. There are women, as men, who are not overburdened with very much. Life perhaps runs more smoothly for such than for those with more acute susceptibilities. If they don't enjoy the pleasures, they at all times avoid the pains suffered by their less phlegmatic sisters.

Cissy so far has been of the former class. A woman who has been accustomed to repress her feelings in her girlhood is not likely to part with her love lightly, — may, indeed, well-nigh stifle any capacity for loving by this unnatural training, — for to

love in some fashion is part of a woman's nature. In high nervous organizations want of outlet for the affections will kill as surely as if it were actually the consumption it is sometimes called.

But Gore, jealous of his wife's love, cannot see that he must call time to his aid; that a woman such as Cissy cannot change mere liking into love at short notice. He has made much progress with her, but is altogether unaware of the fact. She is not a demonstrative woman, as may be supposed. She shows her feelings with some timidity. She cannot forget the jeers such a display had at times provoked from Mark Hemsworth in the early days of their wedded life, and even yet cannot help fearing that any show of emotion may call forth ridicule. It is difficult for a man to discover what advance he makes in the good graces of a woman like Cissy.

Mrs. Gore has met her father upon two or three occasions, since that first interview in Montague square. The major, callous as he is to all other sentiment, is wonderfully soft about this one passion of his scheming existence,—his love for his daughter. He separated himself utterly from her before, as he thought for her good, and what came of it? Better he had been there to restrain Mark Hemsworth in his brutality. He cannot sever all communication between them again. He wishes to see her occasionally, to watch over her, and yet to keep his relationship, indeed his very existence, a secret from her husband for the present. He wants to be convinced that this second marriage has turned out happily, before he discovers himself. Judging from his own knowledge of mankind, he thinks that a man will look over the drawback of a father-in-law's bearing a somewhat unsavory reputation, who should come to him with twelve hundred a-year in his hand. To disclose the history of Cissy's settlement on her first marriage is to make that addition to Montague Gore's income.

On the other hand, should this marriage turn out unhappily, he will keep all knowledge of that settlement to himself, and draw the income derived from it in his daughter's behalf. He knows that the moment he appears upon the scene as Cissy's father, he will infallibly be questioned as to whether there was no settlement on the first marriage. But as long as his whereabouts, or even the fact of his being alive, is unknown, it will be difficult for any one to get at the truth regarding that subject. This settlement is made upon a large farm in Nottinghamshire, which had been left to Mark Hemsworth by an uncle. The tenant was accustomed to pay his rent into the hands of certain bankers at Nottingham, who transmitted it duly to a French house through their London correspondents. But a business man like Hemsworth had money constantly passing to and fro, from his Parisian bankers to various London houses, and *vice versâ*.

It was not easy to find the clue to this property without a guide; of course there was another trustee, but he was the willing abettor of the major in his scheme, with very hazy ideas regarding his legal obligations, a passionate devotion to Cissy's interests, and a firm conviction that, whatever else the major might be, his love for his daughter was no sham.

The strength of a chain is limited to its weakest point, without reference to the stronger links. Your practised intriguers invariably have their weak link, usually overlooked in the complicated web they have woven. Accident hits it, and their scheme becomes nothing. Fate favors them, and the flaw escapes detection. Many notable frauds have come to light through the overlooking of some trifle, that it was scarcely conceivable their originators should have lost sight of. It is in the petty details that swindlers of the *première force* usually break down. Their conceptions are grand, they elaborate their plan with an assiduity and cleverness worthy of better things; but a date, a name, a place, apparently of little consequence, escapes them, and their cobweb is rent past repair. They are taken in their own nets.

It has never occurred to the major that clandestine meetings with his own daughter may be misconstrued, should they chance to be witnessed. It is so impossible almost for a father to imagine that he could be deemed his daughter's lover, that even this astute schemer may be forgiven for overlooking such a probability. It certainly never occurred to bluff John Paynter, when raising his hat to Mrs. Gore one morning in Portland place, as she was walking with her father, that he was more than any other ordinary acquaintance, and it was with the idlest, commonplace curiosity, that two days afterwards, when dining with the Gores, he inquired: —

"Who was your cavalier the other day, Mrs. Gore? — a face I know well, but cannot put a name to."

"When do you mean?" replied Cissy.

"On Thursday, in Portland place; a good-looking man, with hair just shot with gray."

The major had eschewed his spectacles upon that occasion.

"I don't recollect," replied Cissy, taken a little aback.

"Oh, nonsense! you must remember. You returned my bow, you know. A shrewd, sharp face, and seemed as if his talk was worth listening to. I'll swear I've seen him about town."

"Yes, of course; how stupid of me! Don't you think you were rather rude not to stop and shake hands? Really, Lizzie, you should teach him better manners. I declare, he all but cut me; and you are responsible, my dear, for him on those points."

"Of course I am," returned Mrs. Paynter, seeing, with all the quickness of a woman, that her friend wished the conversation turned. "Are you disengaged on Wednesday, Cissy? If so, I have a box at Covent Garden. Come with me; and hear Patti."

"Shall be charmed; and now I think we will go upstairs and look for some tea."

Montague Gore had not lost a word of this discussion. He thought very little about it at the time; but it happening to recur to him, just after the Paynters had left, he also idly asked: —

"Who was your friend of Thursday, Cissy?"

"Nobody you know," returned his wife.

"Perhaps so; but I suppose he has a name," observed Gore, listlessly.

Cissy paused for a moment, and then said: —

"Well, that's just what he has not, just now. I met him in Paris, and have known him for some years. He does not want his presence in England talked about."

"I don't want to interfere with you, Cissy, but, however old a friend he may be, I think, under those circumstances, you would be wiser not to walk with him."

"You tell me not to," demanded Mrs. Gore, a little sharply.

"Nothing of the kind. I have too much confidence in you to say anything so authoritative. I merely suggested it were, perhaps, better not to do so, should you meet him again."

"I understand," replied Cissy, as she lit her bedroom candle, and walked somewhat moodily away to reflect upon this complication that had suddenly arisen in her new life.

Gore mused a little upon who this mysterious friend of his wife's Paris days might be. He reflected that Cissy might have formed acquaintance in those times that it was by no means desirable she should keep up. No idea of jealousy had, as yet, presented itself to his mind, but the soil was ripe for the sowing. With his morbid feelings regarding his wife's love for himself, there never was ground better adapted for the rearing of "the green-eyed monster."

> "If I do prove her haggard,
> Though that her jesses were my dear heartstrings,
> I'd whistle her off, and let her down the wind, —
> To prey at fortune,"

would be pretty much the idea of a man of Montague Gore's temperament. Men of this frame of mind sometimes both suffer themselves, and inflict needless tortures on women thoroughly true to them. And yet it must be said for Montague Gore that he was not a suspicious man. He believed implicitly in the woman he had married, — in her honesty, in her rectitude. He would have scorned to interfere with her selection of acquaintances. He knew she had been sorely tried, and firmly believed she had borne her temptations as few women, so young as she then was, would have been capable of doing. But he was painfully alive to the fact that, as yet, he had not won her love. He began to despair of ever gaining it. He had thought when he married that such entire love as his must gain response before long, she had been so truthful about her feelings when she accepted him. Alas! she was so truthful still. She never condescended to simulate the passion she did not feel. He could not get over this. Esteem! gratitude! bah! He wanted this woman's heart. He craved for that way to "the side door," which, as Wendell Holmes says, "opens at once into the secret chambers."

Breakfast was nearly over the next morning, when Cissy exclaimed, a little nervously: —

"Montague, you must let me have some more money, please; I am destitute."

"You really ought not to be," he replied, gravely. "I gave you fifty pounds only a fortnight ago."

"I know, but things cost so much. I ought not, I suppose, to have spent it all, but I have, and there are the house-bills to settle this week."

"Well, I cannot give it you now, for I've not above four or five pounds in my pocket, which would not be of much use; but I will draw a check on my way to the Temple, and you shall have what you want this afternoon."

"Very many thanks."

"But, Cissy, my dear, do bear in mind I'm a man of moderate means. I don't want to deny your right to dip your pretty fingers into my purse; still, if you're not a little more careful, the time will come when you will dip to no purpose."

"I will try," she replied; "but, Montague, remember, it comes difficult to me. I have hitherto been taught only to spend money."

"A shocking preparation for thrifty housekeeping," he rejoined, laughing. "Never mind, you will learn in time. And now I must be off. Good-by, my wife," and, having pressed his lips lightly on her brow, Gore took his departure.

"He's very good to me," muttered Cissy. "I thought he would have said more about my spending so much money. Moderate means! I do wish somebody would explain to me what constitutes moderate means. I must ask Montague how much it is a month, and how much again of that I may have; and having ascertained all that, well, I suppose," she continued, laughing, "I shall spend double. The science of economy is the most difficult study I ever tried yet."

Her meditations finished, Mrs. Gore remembered that she had some shopping to do. If you are at all known, an empty purse is not the slightest impediment to that in London; in fact, the only wonder is the credulity of the West-end tradesmen is not more severely punished. A fashionable address, a brougham, the display of a little ready money to start with, and a very moderate stock of assurance, will induce credit past belief amongst them. Cissy, having issued her orders to one or two well-known millinery establishments in Regent street, turns down Conduit street; and as she enters Bond street finds herself face to face with her father.

"My dear," exclaimed the major, "where are you trotting to? Let's turn into Berkeley square and have a chat."

"Nowhere in particular," replied Cissy, as she took his arm; "but, father, gossiping with you leads to awkward questions. Mr. Paynter, a friend of mine, passed us the other day in Portland place, and he wants to know who you are."

"Curse his inquisitiveness!" rejoined the major, promptly. "A species of Paul Pry, I presume."

"No, father dear, he's nothing of the sort. He's as good, straightforward a man as ever lived, has been very kind to me, and is a great friend of my husband's; indeed, it was at his house that I first met Montague. It was put as an idle question of curiosity, but it was awkward."

"And what did you say?" inquired the major, as they turned the square.

"Fell back, *mon père*, upon my sex's usual weapon in such time of difficulty, — evasion."

"And it stood you in good stead?"

"Only moderately so; if it hadn't been for Lizzie's quick tact, — that's his wife, you must know, — I don't think it would. But she saw I wanted the conversation turned, and she did it."

"Ah! well, then, there's no harm done."

"Yes, there is; for Montague took it into his head to ask afterwards with whom I had been walking."

"And you told him?" asked the major, sharply.

"That it was somebody he had never heard of, — an old Parisian acquaintance, who, for reasons best known to himself, did not wish his presence in London to be talked about.

"And that satisfied him, child, eh?"

"Well, he said no more; but suggested, under those circumstances, I had better not be seen walking with you. He was kind, father, as he always is. There was no must not, nor shall not, about it. He merely hinted that it was injudicious."

"And he was right, Cissy. I'm beginning to believe in this new husband of yours. A man who gives advice instead of commands to the woman he has made his wife deserves her attention, to say the least of it. It is a pity you can't love him, child."

Mrs. Gore's face flushed like a girl's, as she listened to her father's commendation of her husband, and it was in almost a whisper she replied: —

"I like him a great deal better than I did; am growing to like him better every day, I think. He is so kind, so thoughtful. I had to tell him to-day I wanted some more money, and I could see he considered I had spent a great deal more than I had a right to; but all he said was that if I wasn't more careful I should come to the bottom of the purse, and then it would be no use my putting my hands into it."

"But I told you the other day I had money of your very own for you if you wanted it. I haven't got it about me, but come along to my rooms in Charles street. I can give you a hundred of your very own money, Cissy."

"That would be nice," she replied, as visions of liquidating one or two outstanding accounts crossed her mind. "Let us go."

It was very little way to walk, and Cissy speedily found herself installed in the most carefully calculated chair for comfort in the major's most carefully balanced establishment. She smiled, as she noted all the old habits of order that she had been familiar with as a child; not that she had ever lived much with her father, but she remembered well how punctilious he was wont to be on these points. Even now, as she threw her hat carelessly on the writing-table, he removed it and placed it quietly on another as more appropriate. And yet he was so pleased to have her there. He insisted she should have a glass of wine, dived into a mysterious cupboard, and produced a cobwebbed bottle of port that he averred was supposed to be old, very old. He hunted out biscuits for her. This shrewd, hard, cynical shearer of human lamb-

kins fluttered about his daughter in a manner that those who knew him could not have believed. I don't think there were many of his acquaintance would have believed in a soft spot in Major Jenkens.

While Cissy sipped her port and nibbled her biscuit, the major had unlocked an old-fashioned walnut escritoire, from one of the drawers of which he took a roll of bank-notes.

"Give me your purse, child," he said, as he crossed towards her, "and I will fresh-stock it for you."

"Indeed it needs it sadly," she replied, laughing, as she handed her neat morocco portemonnaie over to him. "It is pure ostentation carrying about such a useless article as it is at present."

"There," he replied, as he returned it after a few seconds, "that's better, Cissy. You will find ten notes for ten pound apiece when you next open it. Remember in future that I have a good deal of money of yours. You have only to write to me when you want some."

"Thanks, father dear; and now I think I must run away. What a sweet daughter you've got! She drinks your wine, eats your biscuits, gets all she can out of you, in short, and then she's off."

"Ah, well, she's got very little that wasn't her own out of me this morning," said her father, laughing. "Good-by, my darling."

It was late that afternoon when Montague Gore returned home. That his wife was in was evident. Her hat, gloves, parasol, etc., were thrown carelessly on the table, while the tea equipage stood waiting. He sat down, and, taking up the parasol, commenced fiddling with it. In so doing, he displaced Cissy's pocket-handkerchief, which discovered her purse, hitherto concealed. An idea struck him. He threw down the parasol, and, drawing a note-case from his breast-pocket, selected some of the contents; then, taking up the purse, he opened it with the intention of placing the notes within it. To his surprise he found it well filled. He snapped the portemonnaie to again and relinquished his intention. What did this mean? Why on earth should Cissy ask for money when she had plenty? He didn't know how much, — he hadn't counted it; he had no intention of doing so, but that she had several bank-notes in her purse was evident.

He sat for some time pondering over this enigma. He wondered whether she would explain it. If she had all that money, what made her come to him for more? If she had not, how could she have procured it since breakfast? When Cissy entered the room he placed his notes in her hand, with the brief remark: —

"There's what you asked me for; I hope it's enough."

"Thanks, yes; you are very good, Montague, it is ample."

"Why, you haven't counted it, how can you know?"

"Oh! I'm sure it is; I can see it is," she replied, nervously turning over the notes.

Her heart smote her. She would have liked to have told him that she did not want

it now; that she had plenty of money of her own. But then how was she to do this without discovering her father? She was beginning to see that this mystery the major thought proper to maintain regarding their relationship would involve her in endless difficulties; but she never dreamt of breaking her promise to him. She raised her eyes, and fancied she detected a troubled expression in her husband's face, but of course she could not ascribe it to its real cause. She thought he was perhaps still apprehensive of her extravagant habits. She smiled, as she exclaimed: —

"Don't look as if you thought I should ruin you, Montague. I intend to make this go ever so much further than the last."

"We'll hope so, Cissy," he replied, quietly. "I shall watch your economies with great curiosity."

It was evident that she had no intention of explaining.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PUMPING OF MR. TURBOTTLE.

Mr. Brine having, with the natural incoherence of his disposition, arrived at King's Cross precisely three minutes after his train had departed, abandoned himself for a little to the abuse of the railway authorities generally. Reflecting at length that punctuality on their part was scarcely assailable in the journals, and his own watch bearing testimony to the veracity of the station-clock, he ordered his portmanteau to be taken to the Great Northern Hotel, and determined to postpone his journey till the following morning.

It is curious to observe how differently people bear this little *contretemps*. I am supposing, mind, that the disappointment is not involving momentous issues, or even very great inconvenience. There are some who are so agitated at this commonplace misfortune, that you would suppose their very future was involved in arriving at their destination by that particular train. Others phlegmatically pace the platform, study the book-stalls, ascertain their correct weight, and upon the whole rather enjoy themselves, till there comes to them another opportunity of starting on their way.

I knew one philosopher who, scorning to be tied to time in any shape, never looked at a Bradshaw. He drove to the station, and simply asked when the next train started for wherever he might be going. He said nothing amused him more than a big terminus. Some betake themselves to the refreshment-room, and console themselves with the flowing bowl. We, many of us, must remember Mr. Sala's story when he "missed connection" travelling in America, and had, as they say there, "to lie over;" how his two philosophic fellow-travellers, producing a demijohn of whiskey, called for hot water, and, sitting calmly down on either side of the stove, proceeded to abstract

themselves from all such mundane matters as trains, unpunctual or otherwise, arriving speedily at that state of beatitude in which one place is as good as another.

Some there are who drive themselves to the very verge of idiotcy by furious study of Bradshaw, with a view to getting to their destination in a mysterious roundabout manner, meditating, for instance, at a London terminus going round by York to arrive at some place in Surrey. Others, of feeble lymphatic temperament, pass their time in heart-rending appeals to guards, porters, etc., and make frantic dashes at every train that goes off, — no matter for where. They have to be continually taken out of trains by the railway officials, and pour their sorrows undisguisedly, with much superfluous information concerning their families and pursuits, into the ear of the first stranger who is weak enough to listen to them. When their veritable train does start, they are usually in the middle of the recital of their wrongs, and have to be bundled into a carriage breathless at the last moment.

But Fox Brine was none of these. After the first few minutes of exasperation were over, he had made his decision as before narrated. The next question was, what was he to do with himself this afternoon? Exercise? Yes, he wanted exercise. Now in what direction should he take his exercise? Suddenly it occurred to him that he had not called upon the Paynters since dining there.

"The very thing," quoth Mr. Brine. "I can just slip along the Euston road, and there we are; the social amenities respected, and the liver kept in order all in one. Who wouldn't be a slave to society? Off she goes."

Mr. Brine rejoiced in the usual fortune which attends making a call some distance off in London, — he was privileged to leave a card. When shall we arrive at that great social reform when an engraved post-card will be deemed sufficient acknowledgment of the wines and cakes we have consumed? "Idleness is the root of all calling," quoth Dr. Desent. He is wrong. The bachelor who *does* his calls conscientiously in London can never be accused of idleness, and should be in a very tolerable condition for the 12th, unless he resorts to cabs or similar depravity, — broughams on credit, for instance. Married men expect their wives to take this duty upon their own shoulders, and it is to be hoped either keep carriages for them, or pay the livery stable-keeper's account without comment.

Mr. Brine then bethought him of stretching across to the Marble Arch, and so through Hyde Park to his club. "Better a dinner there," he thought, "than a solitary evening at the Great Northern;" and thus it came about that he passed Montague square, and witnessed the parting between Mrs. Gore and her father.

It troubled him a good deal. Gore was one of his oldest and dearest friends, and he had much disliked the idea of his marriage with a woman of whose family he knew nothing, and of whose antecedents he knew so very little more. But Brine was a man of the world, and knew that to attempt to argue with a man in love, especially when he was of Gore's age, probably results in a quarrel with your friend, but nothing else. He had taken a dislike to Cissy, when he met her at the Paynters'. He could allege no reason for such dislike, — one of those instinctive antipathies we all occasionally con-

ceive, and to which some of us are so much more prone than others; such dislike, at times, well warranted by further knowledge of the person; at others, on more intimate acquaintance, admitted to have been absurd and unjust. Love at first sight, if not a frequent, is by no means quite so rare an occurrence as may be supposed. Prejudice against or in favor of those we meet takes place daily with most of us.

Brine, the next morning, as he speeds on his way to Nottingham, meditates a good deal on that parting he had witnessed. How on earth could a woman in Mrs. Gore's position keep up a clandestine intimacy with such a very doubtful character as Claxby Jenkins? He felt certain that her husband knew nothing of it. What hold had this man over her? What terms must she not be on with him, to warrant his kissing her at parting? Where could she have known him? As he reflects over all these things, Brine, as we are all wont to do when puzzled, builds up a story for himself, based upon a little fact and a good deal of imagination. Yes, Mrs. Gore most likely made the major's acquaintance abroad, during the lifetime of her first husband. He was an old lover, with whom she still thought proper to keep up relations, or she was too much in his hands to venture to break with him. Bear in mind, the major carried his years well, and was not yet fifty. There was nothing the least absurd in supposing him still quite capable of proving a successful wooer, while it was most unlikely that the real connection between him and Cissy should ever enter into Mr. Brine's head. He had accounted for that meeting, as with his slender knowledge concerning Mrs. Gore's previous life most men in his place would have done.

"There are two questions now to put to myself," thought Brine. "First, how am I to ascertain whether Mrs. Gore is yielding willingly to the attentions of that scoundrel, or whether he has simply got some hold over her which obliges her to do his bidding? Secondly, what ought I to do? I can't sit still and see the dearest friend I have on earth wronged; and yet, though I mistrust her and don't like her, it seems rather mean to take advantage of a woman in that way, and whisper so foul a charge behind her back. I wish to Heaven I hadn't missed the train yesterday; in that case I should have known nothing about it." Then Brine reflected how fatal interference between man and wife inevitably was to the interposer. He knew well that Gore was devoted to his bride. He knew further that, though not easy to provoke, he was a man of violent temper when roused. It was quite possible that he would regard him, Brine, as a vile traducer, and thrust the scandalous accusation on one side with vehement contempt.

It was a difficult situation to be placed in, and the more Brine mused over it the more bitterly did he curse the evil destiny that caused him to miss his train in the first instance, and to penetrate to the wilds of Montague square in the second. But the train glides into the Nottingham station, and, having secured his portmanteau, Brine betakes himself to the "George," from which hostelry he intends to prosecute his researches regarding the Hemsworth race.

He had seen the lace and hosiery metropolis but once before; then it was agitated with all the shrieks, cries, crowd, fun, and laughter of the Goose Fair. Now it is

Nottingham the quiescent that lies before him, — Nottingham the sleepy. Not a dozen people to be seen in the big, dusty market-place; only a few loiterers in the broad, burning streets. All provincial cities are given to a siesta; it is only in this huge, bubbling, eddying London of ours that the roar never ceases. Nottingham sleeps; but Nottingham will be lively enough when the factory bells ring at six, as signal that the day's work is done, and the hands pour into the streets for a breath of fresh air before going home to their suppers.

Sanguine as Mr. Brine had been in Mr. John Paynter's dining-room, confidently as he had asserted that he would find lots of Hemsworths, now he had arrived at the scene of his researches he felt a little puzzled how to begin. He moved listlessly about the streets, reading the names over the shop doors; there was infinite variety, but he never met the name he wanted. He put the question confidentially to policemen, trades-people, street-loungers, etc., with an ease and affability all his own; but, as he remarked to himself, though expressed differently, it all comes to the same thing, — "they knows nothing of no Hemsworths."

"It strikes me," mused Mr. Brine, as he sat smoking a solitary cigar in the George coffee-room, "that I have found an occupation. Nottinghamshire is a tolerably large county. I wonder how long it will take to go over it, knock at every door, and inquire if a party of the name of Hemsworth lives within? Wheugh! I have it!" he exclaimed, giving vent to a jubilant whistle. "What a fool I was not to think of it at once! Here, waiter, get me the county directory."

"Yes, sir."

"Pens, inks, and paper. Ah! and some brandy and water; the directory will be dryish reading."

Mr. Brine pursued his researches calmly and resolutely. "It won't take quite so long as walking round the county," he muttered; "but it'll take some time to get through this. How confoundedly thickly populated they appear to be in these parts! If the inhabitants ran about half a dozen to the square mile, I should get on better. Ha! here we have a Hemsworth at last, — a miller at Southwell. I don't suppose he'll do; but it's something to catch a Hemsworth of any kind. I don't think I pledged myself to do more than produce Hemsworths. Good again; here's another, a widow, I presume; keeps a chandler's shop at Mansfield. They don't read like Hemsworths with property, these."

Here Mr. Brine's studies were interrupted by the entrance of a sleek, clean-shaved little man with quick, beady black eyes.

"Indulging in the weed, I see; may be you'd not object to my pipe. All right, William," he continued, turning to the waiter, as Brine nodded assent. "Sip of gin, cold, and a clean clay. I can't a-bear cigars, sir; I know too much about 'em."

"How so?" asked Brine, looking hard at the stranger.

"Bless your innocence, I was in the trade once; I know how they're made, — what a Tommy Dodd-ing business it is, — hay, cabbage-leaves, chopped straw. No, sir, I likes tobacco."

"Why, it's Mr. Turbottle," exclaimed Brine, extending his hand.

"Beg pardon, sir. I don't remember."

"What, not the Goose Fair, and the ingratitude of the British public?"

"Why, if it aint the noble gladiator, dash my wig! This is a start, rum thing, coincidences, sir."

"What do you mean?" inquired Brine.

"Just this; last time we met was in this very room, and I aint been in Nottingham since; and it's likely you aint either."

Brine admitted that it was so; but inquired whether it was the unthankfulness of Nottingham that had caused Mr. Turbottle to, metaphorically speaking, shake the dust of that city from his feet.

"No, sir, no; if you had been in the travelling or Tommy Dodd trade as long as me, you'd reckon up the public pretty much as I do. Curse 'em, there's no knowing where to have 'em; a woman aint half so changeable as the B. P. You're their favorite to day, and they'd tear your 'pitch' down to-morrow. What they're mad for one week, they don't care about the next. The only thing you can't get to an end of is the feminine weakness for cheap jewelry, and the masculine vanity for hearing themselves talk, among wot they calls the democratic classes."

"Ah, you find that so?" interposed Brine, much amused.

"I tell you what it is," said Mr. Turbottle, solemnly, "I never met a young woman, who had three and sixpence, could resist my electro-plated brooches at that figger; and they tell me your countesses has the same weakness, only, in course, they goes for the real thing. Jewelry, sir, is the great weakness of women, whether it's beads or diamonds. There's more girls ruined from love of finery than aught else. But might I ask what brings you into these parts?"

"Certainly; and it's just possible you can help me. I want to discover if a certain Mark Hemsworth ever lived in these parts."

"Mark Hemsworth!" ejaculated Mr. Turbottle, with visible astonishment depicted in his countenance.

"Exactly; I see you know him," retorted Brine, sharply.

"I never said so," replied Mr. Turbottle, relighting his pipe with considerable display of being much engrossed in the performance.

"Not in words; but your face said so, plainly."

"Then my face lied, 'cause I didn't."

"You know him by name, though, if not personally," exclaimed Brine, eying his companion keenly.

"May be I did, and may be I didn't," said Mr. Turbottle, sententiously. "What might you want to know for?"

"Well, that's my business. Did you?"

"I aint going to answer any questions about him. As you say, it's your business and none of mine. My own affairs are quite enough for me to attend to," observed

Mr. Turbottle, throwing himself back in his chair, and commencing to smoke furiously.

"This man does know something about Mark Hemsworth," thought Brine; "but he is not going to tell me anything concerning him. How to make him speak?"

"Now, Mr. Turbottle," resumed Brine, at length, "I want a little information concerning Hemsworth's family and early life. If you can or will give it, I'll make it worth your while."

"Not a bit of use talking, sir," retorted Mr. Turbottle, stiffly. "I don't say I can; but if I could I wouldn't."

"But why not? What is your objection?"

"Because I won't," returned the worthy Turbottle, showing a perspicuity in his reasoning of a somewhat feminine order.

Brine was on his mettle; he considered his reputation involved in the discovery of Mark Hemsworth's antecedents; but he was much too experienced a man of the world to press his companion further on the point at present. It was clear to him that he had lit upon a man, who in all probability could, if he would, give him the information he sought. It was equally clear to him that Mr. Turbottle, for causes best known to himself, was not to be persuaded, either by bribery or argument, to part with his knowledge just now. A bright idea flashed across him, — liquor might loosen his companion's tongue. He changed the conversation, and proposed that Mr. Turbottle should join him in a bowl of gin-punch, — a subtle, insidious compound much in vogue in those parts; cool and innocent as mother's milk to the palate, but with all the elements of intoxication therein, as those that have drank it at Horncastle Fair can testify.

Mr. Turbottle assented gleefully, but the experiment was not a success. Pouring gin-punch into the Trent was as likely to upset the course of the stream, as pouring that liquor into Mr. Turbottle was to throw him off his balance; store of anecdotes, observations on men and manners, flowed freely from his lips; he smoked, jested, and got extremely genial; but further than that he did not go, while his capacity for punch, it soon became evident to his entertainer, far exceeded his own.

When Fox Brine awoke the next morning, he had indistinct memories of difficulties about lighting his candlestick. He found that his watch had unaccountably stopped, and became conscious that if anybody had succumbed to the insidious temptations of gin-punch, it had not been Mr. Turbottle. On inquiring for that worthy, he learned that he had departed early, but whither no one could say.

"Had the clue, and it has slipped through my fingers," quoth Mr. Brine, sadly, over his tea and toast. "What a fool I was not to ascertain his address! If ever I try to make a countryman drunk again, may I be, — well, spifflicated is a good word, and can't be worse than the headache I am at present afflicted with."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MONTAGUE GORE REMONSTRATES.

It is a sad moment when we first conceive distrust of her we love, when we commence to doubt her protestations of affection, when it dawns upon us that the golden charm is broken, when the letters wax shorter and fewer, when we know that some other has taken that place we once thought permanently our own, when we grimly reflect that, —

"Woman's love is writ on water,
Woman's love is traced on sand!"

Men take it differently; cynically as in the above; bitterly as Siebel sings, —

"Me she deceived, and thee she's deceiving;
Devil that she is — whom there's no believing."

Philosophically: "The person you love most is the person with whom you can stay longest without being bored," and it is fair to presume we bore her. It is better so, perhaps, then that our *liaison* should have continued till she bored us. It is well to retreat gracefully from such a position, and relieve the lady of our love. Friendship may be possible, though love lies dead, — a pale phantom crowned with withered roses, — souvenirs of the *beaux moments* that have departed.

There are sore hearts and wet lashes on such occasions. It it not given to either men or women to attain philosophy always upon the shattering of their day-dream. Passion does not, unfortunately, die simultaneously, and on one side or the other there is usually bitter regret. Those light loves, such as the butterfly bears to the flower, are perhaps to be envied; they leave but slight sting behind them. "A little glow, a little shiver," and that is all; but when one conceives a serious passion, it is different; then one suffers. We may jest and mock, but we do. We can't take it all out in work.

Picture to yourself a man, his very veins thrilling with passionate love for the woman he has won to himself for a wife. Think of this man yearning for that answering love which he has hoped for, and feeling that he has not the power to quicken this woman's pulse-beats one to the minute; that the kiss that responds to his is cold and passionless as the adored of Pygmalion before life was transferred into the marble his hand had wrought. Picture to yourself his gradually becoming hopeless of moving this heart for the quickening of which he so thirsts. Think of him feeling sadly and dejectedly that all the wealth of love he had to throw at her feet lay there unacknowledged, unanswered.

Remember that this is no boy, in the wild infatuation of a first glamor, but a man in his prime, loving with all the fierce strength of a man's passion. Then conceive its dawning upon him that she he has made his wife is carrying on an intrigue with another; that this woman, who is as stone to him, has married him with a favored lover in the background; that she has wedded him as a mere convenience, that would enable her to live without being a drain on the resources of the man of her choice. Fancy all this, and you will have some idea of the ghostly phantoms that are now whirling through the brain of Montague Gore.

For it has come now to Gore to be a witness of his wife's parting with the mysterious stranger to whom John Paynter had alluded. No great scene; nothing more than a few words of earnest conversation and a pressure of the hand had he witnessed. Although some distance off, he recognized his wife. He would have scorned to be a spy upon her; but he was on his way home, and overtook her a few seconds afterwards, — no possibility of a mistake. It was undoubtedly Cissy; the man had turned abruptly up a by-street, and he saw him no more.

He asked her no question, and she said no word concerning her acquaintance. But it rankled bitterly in his breast nevertheless. Again and again, that evening, did he turn the conversation upon whom she had met in the course of the day; but, though Cissy mentioned a good many people, she had no idea that he had witnessed her parting with her father, and said never a word on the subject; of course it was not likely that she would. Had she known her husband had seen it she would have been mightily perplexed, and what she might or might not have said regarding it is dubious.

Women are invariably, from the instinct of their sex, more accomplished in falsehoods than men. There are many cases in which modesty compels them to conceal the truth. Things pass under their eyes in life which it is incumbent upon them to pretend not to be aware of. Few of even the highest of them but must have had their ears shocked at times by language unfitted for their hearing; and they arrive at knowledge of which it would seem almost preposterous to suspect them. The lunatic asylums furnish melancholy instances of this: of girls brought up in all the purity of home using speech in their madness which it is difficult to conceive they could have ever known. When a girl loves, her first impulse is to conceal it. How many have said a man nay from no other cause than this, though they have yielded willingly enough to further pressure. But that women lie with better grace than men is a fact attributable to their natural modesty, which teaches them the necessity of, in some measure, practising that art.

Montague Gore is suffering fierce torments. To that terrible suspicion of having lavished his love upon a woman whose heart is of marble has succeeded the dire misgiving that she loves another. He is cherishing the passion of jealousy, — a plant that requires little forcing. Gore hugs it to his breast closely, and it grows apace. How was it his wife came by all those bank-notes? Who is this man that she meets and never speaks of? Easy to see now why she remains all unmoved by his passionate

devotion; the citadel is already occupied. Cissy's heart is no longer in her own keeping; she loves another — is, perhaps, already this man's mistress. No, he will not do her that wrong; surely she cannot be so fair and so false. He thinks of the proud, pure face, and says it is not so. Yet when women meet men unknown to their husbands, what does it mean generally?

Again and again does he return insidiously to this point during the next few days. He is so miserable that he thirsts for some explanation. If she would but allude to having met this man, he fancies all might perhaps be cleared up. But Cissy does nothing of the kind. She begins intuitively to feel that her husband has conceived suspicions of some sort concerning her, and resents them with no little indignation. It has never occurred to her what interpretation could be placed upon these secret interviews. That her father could be deemed her lover is such an utter absurdity that it never entered her head. She does think that her husband might forbid her to see him, and then Cissy wonders sadly what it is that he has done to place himself without the pale of society.

Well, it does not signify; he has ever been a kind, indulgent father to her, and give him up she will not. She does not want this question to arise between her and Montague. She has conceived a very great regard and esteem for him. She is quite conscious of all his patient, watchful attention. She knows how her tastes, how her comforts have been studied, and what she prizes far more, is the courteous deference to her opinion, the quiet way in which her husband consults her on all points. Even the perplexities of his business he talks over with her freely.

To a woman who, in her previous marriage, had been alternately petted and insulted, but had never been treated as a rational being, with a mind that could comprehend anything higher than dress or pleasure, this was inexpressibly sweet. Cissy, too, had learnt much during these last few months. She had naturally excellent abilities, and had mixed of late with cultivated people, who, though they worked, and worked hard, yet did not conceive that money-getting and display were the sole objects of life. She had met men who, though they had a sufficient appreciation of the luxuries and comforts that wealth confers, yet held that turtle, venison, and rare wines, without "good talk," did not constitute a satisfactory dinner, — men who regarded a woman, whose claims to their admiration were based solely on her face and the perfection of her toilet, with no great reverence. They required something more. A pretty doll, however exquisitely dressed, did not satisfy them. They required a woman with ideas, and the power of expressing them, — not a mere figure, all smiles, satin, and simper.

At last Montague Gore determines that he will speak out. He will ask his wife who is this mysterious stranger. Anything would be better than the cruel fancies that haunt him now. To know her false would not be so bitter as to doubt. To mistrust the woman we love is torture. To have knowledge of her guilt is the first step towards burying our love. Our pride is then thoroughly roused; that con-

tempt for treachery inherent in our nature flames out. Even the felon looks down upon his friend who turns queen's evidence. We despise the woman who betrays us; one cannot love where one scorns; but one can understand, looking back regretfully at the dream that has fled, when the coquetry was as yet but teasing in our eyes. The sighing forth, like Sophie Arnould, —

"Oh, le bon temps! J'étais bien malheureuse!"

Even that, perhaps, is better than our present desolation.

It is after dinner. Gore and his wife are in their bright, cheerful drawing-room; he pretending to look over some papers, she playing dreamily on the piano. Cissy is no great musician, but music has a strange effect upon her. You could almost swear to her mood if you heard her fingers running over the instrument when alone. To-night she is apparently somewhat sad, to judge by the mournful melodies that fall from her fingers. At last she gently closes the piano, comes across to the fireplace, and leans listlessly on the mantel-piece.

"Cissy," says her husband, struggling hard to make his tones indifferent, "who was it you were speaking to the day before yesterday when I overtook you?"

It has come at last then. She knew it was impending. How shall she meet it? She hesitates for a moment, not that any idea of subterfuge has entered her head, but she wants to think what is best to say upon the subject.

"He was an old friend, Montague, one of my very oldest; one who has been very kind to me in times gone by. But I cannot tell you his name. He has implored me to keep his presence in this country a secret."

"If you met him by accident, I have no more to say," replied her husband, in slow, measured tones; "but Paynter mentioned having seen you with an unknown individual, who was doubtless the same."

Cissy paused for a moment, then, rearing her head defiantly, exclaimed: —

"I met him by appointment upon both occasions."

"Then I demand to know who it is you meet thus."

"I cannot tell you. I have promised to keep his secret. Montague, can you not trust me?"

"Yes, I do; but the world is uncharitable. A wife's fame should be in her husband's keeping. Cissy, give me your word you will not meet this man again, and I say no more."

He gazed at her anxiously. It was no unreasonable request; no more than he had both right and reason to demand; and yet such was his love for this woman that his heart stood still as he listened for her reply. If she should refuse, then he felt there must open a gap between them he would never bridge.

"I will not," she said, proudly. "Have you so little faith in the woman you have made your wife as this? Does the love you have professed mean that she is to know

nobody without your leave and license? that she is to drop old friends because you have never yet met them? Have you no belief in me, Montague?"

"Don't be absurd, Cissy," he replied, in somewhat husky tones. "I have no wish to control your movements, or supervise your acquaintance; but I may be allowed to object to your meeting a man clandestinely, of whose very name I am ignorant, without being deemed a very tyrannous husband either."

Still it never entered her head that he could think it possible that she was granting rendezvous to a lover. She only thought that he feared her being compromised in the world's eyes, by owning to an acquaintance on whom that world looked askew, as her father had cordially owned it did on him to a certain extent. That her father could be deemed her lover, under any possible circumstances, would always be very slow to occur to a daughter's imagination. What she would have seen at a glance in any other case than her own, what would have been transparent to a woman of the world, as Cissy was, under any other circumstances, she was utterly blind to now.

"You intend, then, to control my movements," she cried indignantly. "Am I to consider myself under surveillance, — that my outgoings and incomings are watched? Speak, sir, is that your intention?"

Yes, it was as he had thought, — this thing would breed bitter quarrel between them; but Montague Gore's face hardened, and his lips were drawn tight as he replied in a deep, stern voice: —

"You have no right to say that. It is a sharp taunt to hurl at me. What I witnessed was by purest accident. What I heard Paynter say, you heard also. I would scorn to watch you in any way; I have no intention of doing so. I forbid you to see this man again. If it comes to my knowledge you have done so, I shall then take such steps as I deem necessary."

If he had said, "I ask you not to see this man again," instead of "I forbid," Cissy might have answered differently; but the spirit of defiance was roused in her now.

"I decline," she replied haughtily, "to pledge myself upon the subject. To watch a woman is to distrust her."

"I never watched you, and never will," he broke in passionately. "For God's sake, go your own way! Don't blame me if I should refuse to bear with it."

She was touched by his evident emotion. She felt more tender towards him at this moment than she, perhaps, had ever done before, though she was trying him so hardly. It is often so. Many a quarrel would have ended happily, if either could have seen midst the angry words the one second when the gleam of the old sunshine flashed through the storm-clouds. But we never do. That soft answer that turneth away wrath is so seldom given.

We hurl back taunt for taunt, and gibe for gibe. Between those who love most are ever the most unappeasable quarrels. The sharp word, the stinging sarcasm, comes doubly home from the lips of those we love; and then there is another version, the old story: —

"Alas! they had been friends in youth;
But whispering tongues will poison truth."

Ah, well, we all know how our friends take good care such wounds are never healed again; how angry speech made in the first tumult of passion is faithfully reported to those ears it should never reach; and the abyss widens day by day, till it becomes unbridgeable in this life.

Cissy remained silent for some minutes, but there was a marvellous softening in her voice when she spoke.

"Montague," she said, gently, "what is it you suspect? What is it you fear?"

"I suspect nothing," he returned, and knew that as he uttered the words he lied; "but I fear much."

"What?"

"The wreck of my life's happiness. You persist in your right to meet this — this adventurer, I'll call him."

"Yes, I must. Trust me, Montague. It is not my own secret, or you should know it this minute. It will be cleared up ere very long. Can you not believe in me for a little?"

She came across to him as she said this, and leaned over the arm of his chair caressingly. It was a great concession for Cissy to make, for, as we know, she was little addicted to such blandishments towards her husband; but he was blind to everything but this fierce jealousy which possessed him.

"Say you will see him no more, and I will believe in you," he replied, curtly.

"I cannot do that," she replied, quickly, and turning abruptly from him.

"On your head be it, then," he rejoined, roughly, "if my trust is shaken. You know how I have loved you. Suspicion is a canker that makes love die apace."

"You are right," she rejoined, sharply, as she lit her candle. "To be suspected without just grounds is folly, I have heard in my old Paris days. You need not fear that of me, Montague; but the man who cannot trust his wife is stuffing his couch with thorns, believe me. Good-night;" and she swept from the room with proud indignation.

You might have deemed she retired an outraged wife had you seen that exit. Surely her husband had fair grounds for remonstrance. But women will apparently put us in the wrong upon such occasions, do we our spiriting wisely and gently as we may.

As for Gore, he sat for some time with his head buried in his hands. He had raised a wall between him and his wife that would not be easy to pull down again. He felt they were wider apart now than ever; and yet, if he had but responded to that overture on her part generously, he had been nearer winning her love than he had ever been yet. As it was, his thoughts shaped themselves somewhat in this wise:—

"If you loved me ever so little,
I could bear the bonds that gall;
I could dream the bonds were brittle:
You do not love at all."

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHAT SHOULD YOU CALL RICH?

WHEN Bessie's engagement was formally announced, there was much flutter and agitation in Roseneath House. Aunt Clementina congratulated the girl heartily; but Miss Matilda took a different view. She asserted that military men were a class upon whom no reliance could be placed; that they were here to-day, and gone to-morrow. When Miss Clementina hinted that was the common lot of humanity, she rebuked her sharply: —

"You know what I mean, Clem; so don't pretend you do not. You know they never know where they may be this time twelvemonth. Poor Bessie may find herself on the borders of the Dead sea, or in the deserts of Astracan before many months are over. Captain Detfield, of course, must go where duty, or glory, or whatever it is, calls him. He may be summoned to kill black people in Africa, or copper-colored ones in Asia. In these times, apearently, civilization always requires that battles and sieges, and such things, should be taking place somewhere. Why couldn't she choose a clergyman? There's safety in that. But these soldiers, oh, dear! they're always away, and 'find in each port a new wife,' as somebody says in a song, or a play, or something. I believe, certainly, that was said relative to the navy; but the army, I dare say, is no better."

Miss Matilda, in short, for two days made Roseneath House very uncomfortable. She told her sister that she ought to have seen what, in truth, Miss Clementina had seen; that she ought to have prevented it; that she should have given her a hint of this some time ago, and she would have soon sent Captain Detfield about his business. In vain did Aunt Clem urge that the guardsman was a very nice match for Bessie; Miss Matilda set her face against soldiers. They were men of neither morals, piety, nor principles; their trade was murder. Why could not her niece have chosen a husband from a more peaceful profession? The Reverend Alexander Sadman, the evangelical light of Islington, had deigned to admire Bessie, and professed a desire to snatch her as a brand from the burning. But here Bessie retorted so fiercely, vowing that, if there were not another man alive, nothing should induce her to bestow her hand upon that clergyman, that Aunt Matilda felt a little cowed.

At the expiration of the two days she had arrived at resignation. Well, they must make the best of it. Thanks to Clementina's folly and Bessie's obstinate infatuation

there was no more to be said. She hoped she had done her duty; she had warned her. But when Bessie had nestled up to her, with her own sweet smile, and whispered, "Won't you do one thing more, Aunt Matilda, — congratulate me?" the good lady fairly broke down, cried a little, and replied, "Bless you, child, may you be happy, though he is a soldier."

"You've got over me, my dear," continued Miss Matilda, when her emotion had a little subsided; "the next question is, whether you can get over Mr. Roxby. Remember, Bessie, he, like myself, is your guardian, and rather a more important guardian than I am; you have always wheedled me into letting you have your own way, since you were a wee thing in short petticoats; but Mr. Roxby, my darling, is made of sterner stuff."

Quite prepared now is Miss Matilda, with all the inconsistency of her nature, to take her niece's part against Roxby, should it be necessary, — take it, too, with strong prejudice in favor of this lover she has so lately condemned, with an obstinacy and disregard of argument known only to her sex.

"It was very clever of you, Charlie," said Miss Bessie, one afternoon, as they sat by themselves in the drawing-room, "to point out to Aunt Matilda that the army, besides fighting abroad, were the upholders of the crown, church, and order at home."

"Well, you see, pet, it was necessary to disabuse Miss Stanbury of the idea that we were mere hired bravadoes, whose mission it was to go on continual cut-throat expeditions into foreign lands. I don't really think we have much to do with upholding church and state, and all that sort of thing. I only know that the fellows, who talk sedition at the foot of the Nelson column, won't find *us* fraternize as the soldiers do in Paris; as the old song says: —

"'Ere the king's crown goes down, there are crowns to be broke.'

The demagogues needn't imagine we shall not stand to our colors, if they ever venture to try the question; and our men follow their officers."

"Well, never mind that now. I want to talk to you about something much more serious."

"What a disloyal little girl it is," replied Detfield, laughing, — "as if anything could be more serious than the safety of the crown and our institutions."

"Now do be serious, Charlie! You have got to see Mr. Roxby, and you know he may say — "

"That you are much too good for me," interrupted Detfield. "He will be right, — you are."

"Stop; do listen to me," cried the girl, as she moved across to his side; "I have something to tell you."

"I am all ears, *ma mie*," replied her lover, as he passed his arm around her slender waist, and drew her closer to him.

"Well, you know, I am afraid he will object to our engagement."

"Let him; what does it matter? You have promised to wait, and I am afraid before I can claim you it will be past his power to object. You will have the right to dispose of yourself without reference to Roxby."

"But, Charlie, suppose I have some money? I am so glad I have, for your sake."

"What do you mean?" inquired Detfield, curiously. He had no suspicion as yet that she was an heiress. That she might have some little of her own was, of course, possible.

"But I have a good deal of money, at least what I think a good deal of money. What should you think a good deal for your wife to bring you?" and, as she spoke, she raised her head from his shoulder, and peered inquisitively into his face.

"I have never thought one atom about it, Bessie. I took you for yourself, sweet. If I had thought you were rich, I don't think I should have ever asked you to be my wife."

"Be quiet, Charlie," replied the girl, extricating herself a little from his close embrace. "I want to know what you would call rich for me."

"You are rich enough in yourself, child. What makes you so vain of your small fortune?"

"But it isn't small," she replied, in quick, earnest tones; "at least, I'm told not. What would you consider a big fortune to get with your wife?"

"What is it you mean? I don't understand you."

"Answer my question."

"Well, if you have three or four thousand pounds of your own, Bessie, it would be pretty pin-money for you, child."

"But I've a great deal more than that," she cried, with sparkling eyes, and clapping her hands. "Your wife, sir, will be a rich woman."

He had solved now the one thing she was so curious to know. She knew he had taken her for herself, but what she did wish to learn was what he would consider a fortune.

Detfield gazed at her in blank bewilderment, and his face of blank astonishment redoubled the girl's merriment.

"Listen, Charlie," she exclaimed at length, throwing her arms round his neck. "You thought we were going to be, oh, so poor! Well, we are not. I shan't have to clean the grates, and you won't have to addle your brains money-making either. I am the proud possessor, they tell me, of— Stop! guess, — guess, I insist."

But he remained mute.

"Did you say ten thousand pounds? Not near enough, Charlie. No, twenty won't do. I believe I have thirty to bring you; and, my darling, I give it you with all my heart," and the soft lips sought his, and the remainder of her speech was of a kind, which those who have loved can imagine, but those who narrate cannot describe.

Detfield was dumfounded. He had paid these Islington visits with most mercenary motives. He had paid strenuous court to Mammon, and all the while the purer love

had eclipsed it. He had failed lamentably in his scheme, and yet it seemed that he had wooed and won Danae, after all. It was impossible to look upon Bessie's sweet face and doubt the truth of her statement. He had broken into the brazen chamber unwittingly.

"Are you not glad, Charlie," she said, at length, "to find that we shall not be quite so poor as you thought?"

The troubled expression of his face frightened her; and still he sat mute, though holding her close in his arms.

"My darling, I am not quite sure," he replied, slowly, at length. "What looked so easy just now appears very differently after your confession. I had no idea of this. It's God's truth I thought you were portionless. That you might have money some day I deemed probable. But, Bessie, I wooed you for yourself, and never counted upon such chances. Do you believe?"

"Yes, entirely. I know it."

"Well, you see now, speaking to your guardian becomes a very different thing. I, a ruined spendthrift, am going to ask for the hand of a girl of fortune. When I thought you had next to nothing it seemed simple. As it is, he has a right to object, and object strongly."

"Let him; what does it matter? The time must come when my money will be my own," cried the girl, proudly. "I said I would wait for you and trust in you, Charlie. Do you think I am less likely to do it now than when you thought me penniless?" and she gazed anxiously into his face.

"But, Bessie, they will tell you that you can do much better than marry me."

"That happens to be a question Bessie, sooner or later, must solve for herself. She tells you now that you have won her heart. If you love me, Charlie, you'll not blench because there may be difficulties in the way."

Detfield looked at her for a moment; but the proud, passionate love that he read in her eyes would have made most men swear to win her, let the obstacles be what they might.

"God bless you, child!" he whispered, as he kissed her. "With a fortune or without, you're mine, are you not?"

"Yes, with a fortune, Charlie," she replied, smiling, and looking up into his face.

"Better so for both our sakes. But I am off now to confront this guardian of yours. He has been civil enough to me whenever I have met him; but present circumstances may change his tone. A chance acquaintance and a candidate for the hánd of his heiress ward are very different men."

"Hush, Charlie dear! no more about the heiress if you love me. You are going to ask my guardian's consent to our engagement; and, remember, I am as anxious as you to know what he says."

"Good-by, sweet. I will send you a note this evening to tell you what may be the result of our interview."

Once more the lovers' lips met, and then Detfield tore himself away.

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. ROXBY AS A GUARDIAN.

MUCH too earnest in his love was Detfield to dream of postponement of his interview with Roxby. We all know that *laissez aller* stage of fast life, when the main point is to put off the disagreebles as long as possible; when the facing of our difficulties is a thing to be deferred as long as feasible. We know it, also, when we have sobered down, and such things are supposed to be circumstances of the past. We withhold from the wife of our bosom the results of that last disastrous speculation. We delay, yes, would fain always delay, confiding to our friends the failures we have made; wonderfully reticent we are always about these failures. When our play, novel, or investment has turned out a perfect fiasco, how we do gloss it over, and demonstrate that it is malevolent fortune only that is the cause of our weeping and wailing! Does the man exist who will own to having written a bad story, a bad drama, or embarked in unsound speculation? No, my brethren; critics, the public, the stock exchange, etc., know naught. It was the Fates that were against us. What a blessing to think it was fate and no shortcomings on our own part! How comforting to reflect that we, at least, have nothing to reproach ourselves with!

Charlie Detfield, as he walks down to the city to see Mr. Roxby, ponders a good deal, as is natural, upon what he knows of this guardian of Bessie's: a pleasant, jovial, genial gentleman, in vast expanse of white waistcoat, with ties to match, more voluminous than suit the guardsman's idea of dress. But he is aware that breadth of necktie is associated with the consumption of turtle, and the manufacture of money. He tolerates these little eccentricities of evening toilet as a part of the vocation to which Roxby is affiliated. Charlie reflects that he has seen country gentlemen of good repute and high esteem in their several counties with similar proclivities regarding costume. But what he tries hard to recollect is what he can of Roxby's manner; in short, what manner of man is Roxby.

A very difficult problem to solve that till you test it. Your genial friend over night turns out a very hard man to do business with next morning. Do you recollect that story of *the* Lord Mansfield, who, after passing a pleasant evening with Dr. Brocklesby, happened to have that illustrious physician brought before him as an evidence in some case the next morning? The doctor nodded affably, as he entered the witness-box; the judge took no notice, but when he came to sum up he alluded to him in this wise: "The next witness is one Brocklesby or Rocklesby, I am not sure which, and first he swears that he is a physician."

No, you cannot quite arrive at the conclusion as to what a man is, if you have only met him over port-wine and walnuts. And this was about the extent of Detfield's knowledge of Roxby. But he was no whit the less determined on this account, in

homely phrase, to have it out with that eminent financier. Still he did wish that he knew a little more about Roxby. He had indistinct visions of having, upon two or three occasions, treated that gentleman with supercilious indifference. What was Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba? He had little thought, then, that Roxby might have a good deal to say to a most important step in his life. It is ever so; and a careless jest or cynical remark often mars a man's career more than he dreams of. That is why the stupid people, who can't talk, so constantly beat their more brilliant compatriots in the race of life. To be a good listener is to forward your interests in this world. To be a good talker is a very dubious advantage.

At last Detfield arrives in Fenchurch street, the place in which Roxby transacted his multifarious business; for he was a man of much speculation and enterprise, this guardian of Bessie's. He was always floating companies, or winding them up, taking shares or selling them, promoting financial undertakings to benefit his fellow-creatures, or picking the bones of such enterprises when they had proved to be founded on sandy foundations, — as in good truth many of the schemes offered by Roxby and his friends to the credulous public turned out to be. Still Mr. Roxby was regarded on 'change as a man who could take pretty fair care of himself; and if his Central African Railways or Nebraska Mining Company had proved rather disastrous investments to shareholders, the city generally did not think Mr. Roxby personally had lost much money in those high-sounding speculations.

But to see this active gentleman in his hive was not quite so easy as Detfield had anticipated. He was asked to sit down and wait, while a clerk having politely handed him a portion of the "Times," took his card in. The supplement of the "Times" did not amuse Detfield. It does not some people, though I am never clear that it is not the most entertaining part of that paper. But the other sheets were in the hands of two other gentlemen, who were fidgeting on their chairs, and literally snorting with impatience for an interview with the great financier. At first Charlie watched his companions lazily, and with some little amusemment; but gradually he arrived at that state of irritation which they had already attained.

At the expiration of half an hour he sat down and wrote a note, requesting to see Mr. Roxby on business of the utmost importance. Mr. Roxby sent down a line in reply, to say that he was up to his eyes already in business of that nature, and likely to remain so; would Captain Detfield give him the pleasure of his company at dinner, seven sharp? Having signified assent, Charlie departed; but even this had a somewhat depressing effect upon him. He had promised to write that night to Bessie, and tell her what her guardian had said. This, now, was impossible.

Punctual to time did Detfield drive up to Roxby's house, in Gordon square, a quiet and well-appointed bachelor's establishment. Here, at all events, he had not long to wait. He had been scarce five minutes in the drawing-room before his host appeared, and apologized laughingly for not seeing him in the city.

"But, my dear Detfield, there is business and business; I always have my hands full, and, unless I am much mistaken, yours can be discussed comfortably over our

claret after dinner. East of Temple Bar, you see, time is money. Now when you have partaken of what my cook has been able to improvise for us at short notice, I shall be quite at your service, — ready to listen and discuss. Come along."

Very little need to apologize for that dinner. It was as good as two men could well sit down to, and Roxby was much too experienced a tactician to dwell upon shortcomings which he knew did not exist.

"I pay my servants high," he replied, in answer to a complimentary remark of his guest's on the entertainment, as they sat over their wine, "and let them cheat me pretty much as they will; they know there's only one thing I won't submit to, — shortcomings on any point. I take no excuse. If they are not equal to emergencies, they are not fit for my place. My cook was telegraphed to five minutes after you sent up your assent to dine here. I should have expected her to find a decent dinner for half a score at such notice. Of course she can do better with more time; but in London, with *carte blanche*, if a woman can't improvise something decent in four hours she won't do for me."

"Well, I should say you are pretty fairly suited."

"Yes. All these things are a mere question of money. What you want is always in the market, if you can afford to pay for it. Pictures, china, moors in Scotland, country-house, anything you like. I'm a moderate man; I go in for comfort. This is not a big house, — I don't want one, — but it is furnished as luxuriously, to my tastes, as is possible. My one hobby is perfectly-trained servants. I don't often keep them over three years; they begin to think then you can't do without them, as if there were not quite as good to be had as ever were parted with. No, don't pass that claret; it's forty-eight, and you won't meet genuine forty-eight very often nowadays."

"But I have got something very important to discuss with you, Mr. Roxby," replied Charlie, as he filled his glass.

"Of course you have, my dear fellow," interposed his host; "but we'll have that presently over a cigar and our coffee. Haven't you come down expressly to have a talk, the subject of which I can make a pretty good guess about? But never mind that yet, finish off the decanter, and we'll have another bottle. The wine's good enough to go on with a little longer."

Detfield winced at the familiarity of his host. Roxby had never addressed him in this easy fashion before, and Charlie had an intuitive feeling that it boded him no good. Most men would have heralded it as a propitious omen; but somehow he did not. The weather was rather *too fine*. Such very summery mornings often end in thunder-storms; and this was just Detfield's sensation.

It certainly did not occur to the guardsman that his host was pressing him to drink; but it was so. Mr. Roxby had a somewhat awkward proposition to make, and he, from the depths of his experience, considered that these things were mellowed by wine; that they rather lost their grim deformity when viewed through a considerable amount of liquor. But Charlie was no neophyte, and it took a good deal of claret to

affect him. Still we do know that what appears so easy in the smoking-room over night often assumes a very different aspect the next morning; our difficulties of nine A.M. shrink as the night wears away. The creditors that have appalled a man over his tea and toast are men of buckram after supper. But cigars and coffee appear at last, and Charlie goes at once to the subject.

"Of course you have guessed, Mr. Roxby, what it is I have to say to you."

His host nodded.

"I love your ward, and she has consented to be my wife; subject, naturally, to your consent."

Diplomatic this, upon Charlie's part. As arrangements stood between him and Bessie, it was to be with, if possible, — without, if not.

"Exactly," replied Roxby, slowly, and ejecting a cloud of smoke from his lips; "but as her guardian, I must put a question or two to you before I give my consent. Of course, as far as position goes, etc., you're most eligible; but then, my dear Detfield, you see you're ruined."

"Well, I don't know how you know it, but I don't want to blink the fact," returned Charlie, doggedly; "I am."

"My dear sir," replied Roxby, as he flipped the ashes from his cigar, "we know all this kind of thing in the city."

"I told her so," continued the guardsman, not heeding the interruption; "and it's God's truth, when I asked her to be my wife, I had no idea she was an heiress."

Mr. Roxby smiled; it was a smile of much incredulity. He did not believe this statement in the least. Had not his tool, Jenkens, sought out this ingenuous young man, and introduced him to Bessie for the express purpose of repairing his shattered fortunes? "Well, if Captain Detfield wished to play the hypocrite to himself, all the better," thought Mr. Roxby. "When a man is a hypocrite, he is never shocked at a little piece of roguery. Clever fellow, Jenkens, — cleverer than I have thought him lately. I was half afraid he had made a mistake in his man."

So musing, Roxby rubbed his hands softly, and then replied: —

"Well, now, my dear Detfield, you have found out your mistake, I presume you are fairly satisfied with the discovery."

"I am, for her sake," rejoined Charlie, earnestly, "though not for my own. It makes what I have to ask of you considerably more difficult. You've a right to object to a ruined man being engaged to your ward, who is rich; if she had been poor, it would have been different."

"Quite so," replied Roxby. He had no intention of making Detfield's explanation easy for him. It would hardly suit the terms he intended to propose, — the bargain he meant to make. He was one of those unscrupulous men who make capital out of everything they do. He had become, by accident, guardian to a wealthy ward; she had arrived at a marriageable age. Mr. Roxby's intention was to sell her. If Detfield would not pay his price, somebody less nice on such points would. At present, he thought he should have little difficulty in driving his bargain. A ruined man, who

opened his case by pretending that he had wooed Bessie in ignorance of her riches: "No need to be very scrupulous with him," thought Roxby. Of the real state of the affair it was of course impossible he could have a suspicion. Of the mistake Detfield had been led into regarding Miss Clementina, he had no conception. All he knew was that his agent, Jenkens, had introduced this man to his ward with a view to "marrying money." Detfield had wooed Bessie with his eyes open. What he might choose to say now was only the specious gloss men throw over a transaction of which they are a little ashamed.

Roxby had considerable contempt for such weakness, and judged men's flaccidity of character rightly a good deal by such small traits. He had reason. If you intend to be a scoundrel, do not be that meanest of beings, a cowardly one. Though we detest, we respect, Iago; we despise Macbeth.

Charlie had expected some assistance from his host, some sign of encouragement to proceed, at all events; but Mr. Roxby continued to smoke placidly, as if they were conversing upon the mere topics of the day. After a silence of some minutes, Detfield once more took up his speech.

"I suppose," he said, "you are thinking all this over. Answer me one thing. Will you give me Bessie?"

"That depends on the result of this conversation. A man who has succeeded in ruining himself in London life, and has got to your years, — though they are not very many, still you've passed the age of puppydom a good bit, — should be a man of the world."

He paused here, but Charlie only nodded.

"Well," resumed Roxby, "you, a broken man, marry my ward with her thirty thousand pounds, — she has that, — pay off your debts, and settle down as a virtuous and sober member of the community. Not very bad business on your part, is it?"

"I wooed her for herself. I had no idea she had money. I thought Miss Clementina was the heiress," interposed Charlie, warmly.

"Devilish clever, by Jove!" thought Mr. Roxby. "I have seen a good many of 'em declare they had no idea the lady had a fortune; but this is a master-stroke. This young man is really brilliant."

"Well," he continued, laughing, "you've, at all events, made a very comfortable mistake, Detfield, on your side of the ledger. Now, I am going to talk to you as a man of the world. You'll make a good thing of this marriage. My consent *is* of consequence to you. Show me fair reasons for giving it."

"I don't understand you," replied Charlie, opening his eyes.

"Pooh! pooh! my dear fellow; yes, you do. I hate fencing. Let's come to the point. Five minutes will settle it, if you will speak plain."

"I shall have to understand you before I can," replied Charlie, gravely, now most completely puzzled.

"Psha!" returned the other, impatiently, "what is the use of beating about the bush in this fashion? Give me good reasons for assenting to this marriage."

Still Charlie stared blankly at his interlocutor.

"What, you want it put still plainer?" continued Roxby, vehemently. "This match will be a good thing for you. What is it going to be worth to me?"

"I see," replied Detfield, after a short pause. "You mean your consent must be purchased."

"Of course I do. Why couldn't you speak out at once? It isn't likely that I am going to resign the good-will of a valuable property for nothing. You're a cool hand, to do you justice. I suppose you wanted to draw me about the price."

"Perhaps so," replied the guardsman, dryly.

"Well, I never hem and haw," resumed Roxby, in jubilant tones. "It's not my way of doing business. I buy or I sell at a jump. I never haggle about the price when I want a thing, and I don't stand beating down when I sell. Five thousand is my figure. It's not much more than fifteen per cent. on what will fall to you."

"But I haven't got it," responded Charlie, with the greatest composure.

"Of course you haven't; but you will have as soon as you are married to Bessie. I'll have a deed drawn up that will make that all right."

"Still, you see, this is her money, not mine," interposed Detfield, with a peculiar blandness that might have warned a less excited man than his host that he was treading on dangerous ground.

But Roxby, ever of a sanguine disposition, warmed with the wine he had drank, and quite convinced in his own mind that Charlie was as unprincipled as himself, — that he had sought Bessie's love only for her money, and that all this affected ignorance was but mere clever fencing on his part, — saw it not one whit.

"Bah!" he rejoined, laughing. "Leave that to me. I will stand your friend when the settlements are made out. You shall have no cause to complain that they are drawn too tightly. Now, what do you say?"

"Say?" replied Charlie, slowly, as he threw his cigar into the grate. "I say that you are, in fact, the greatest blackguard it was ever my misfortune to dine with."

"Sir, do you mean to insult me?" cried Roxby, springing to his feet.

"I should fancy that next to impossible," returned Detfield, rising leisurely from his chair. "Don't bluster; it's only gratuitous noise, you know. Out-and-out scoundrels of your sort are never physically dangerous, and any attempt at personal violence will only recoil on your own head. Good-night."

"You shall never marry Bessie Stanbury," cried Roxby, in a voice hoarse with passion.

"I think I shall. We shall see."

"You shall be rotting in a sponging-house before the week is over," screamed Roxby. "You, at all events, cannot afford to wait."

But Charlie vouchsafed no reply, and took his departure.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A KISS WITH A STING IN IT.

MONTAGUE GORE and his wife have drifted slowly apart since the conversation of a few evenings back. Cissy, conscious of her innocence, and in no wise comprehending how much jealousy has to do with her husband's remonstrance, feels indignant at the distrust of herself conveyed thereby. She knows there is nothing to find fault with much in these mysterious meetings. She cannot see from any point of view but her own. She simply deems Montague suspicious,—wanting in belief of the rectitude of the woman he has made his wife.

As for Gore, with him suspicion and jealousy have grown apace. He scorns to take any note of his wife's actions. Even when the post comes in, he glances no more at the letters than to see what may be for himself. "Mrs. Gore" is quite sufficient to prevent his looking further. He asks no questions now. He never demands, as he did in their early days, "Who's your correspondent, Cissy? Has he or she anything amusing to say?" Even when his eye catches Mrs. Paynter's well-known calligraphy his tongue is silent.

Cissy is beginning to interpret this in a fashion all her own. She cannot believe that all this cold indifference is due entirely to their disagreement (so she terms it to herself) of the other night. She also is gradually, though, as yet, somewhat mistily, weaving for herself a chemise of Nessus. She would have laughed had you told her so; but the thread of jealousy is incorporated with this fanciful woof that she is spinning. She muses on their gradual estrangement. "Surely he did love me dearly once. How devoted he was during our Continental trip! How keen always to hear what Lizzie had to say! How he enjoyed her fun and gossip! Now he never asks what may be in her letters. Is it this, that she was an old flame? She speaks of him as a very old friend; we do call our former loves by that name sometimes. Has the old passion once more reasserted itself and extinguished the new; has love for Lizzie killed his fancy for me? It must have been but a fancy that he had for me; yet, if it was so, how do men speak and look when they love? How should I know,—I who never have had love to give to man? Why does he no longer care to see her letters? Can it be that he has letters of hers to read that I know nothing of? It may be. It is impossible to believe that because I decline to give up occasionally seeing an old friend, who, for reasons known to himself, does not wish to face society, Montague should treat me so coldly. There must be something more than that." Thus argued Cissy, turning the whole thing over in her mind pretty constantly.

As may be easily conceived, under such circumstances, the estrangement between them widened day by day. Confidences were a thing of the past. Gore sought his house only just in time to dress for dinner. Such evenings as they passed at home,

he betook himself to his work, and left Cissy to her book,—jealousy and distrust gathering on both sides; the husband suffering torture that he strove to lull to sleep, as in the old sorrow of many years back, by dint of hard work; the wife slowly awaking to a dull feeling of pain, that she felt unable to comprehend, but with a proud consciousness of unjust treatment.

It was not to be supposed that the discord in the house could escape the sharp eyes of one so intimate with the Gore *ménage* as Mrs. Paynter. That lady speedily discovered that there was something wrong, and quickly did she resolve that she would know the rights of it. Flighty, volatile, she might be, but Lizzie Paynter was a very stanch friend to those she loved, and these were two people she had a great regard for. She did think, in her sanguine way, that if she could but get to the bottom of this misunderstanding, which, it was clear, existed between Cissy and her husband, it was possible she might bring them together again.

"It will be difficult," mused Mrs. Paynter, shaking her pretty head sagaciously. "Interfering between husband and wife is a delicate operation, very. Cissy, too, is getting decidedly repellant in her manner towards me. But, my dear Cissy, I like you rather too well to stand that. I shall have it out some time when you don't expect it. Montague, too, goes about moped and indifferent; says he's overworked. No, Montie, that won't do for me. It's something a good deal more than overwork is the matter with you."

When Mrs. Paynter talked the subject over with her husband, she was rather astonished at the way he spoke concerning her scheme.

"Better not, Lizzie," he said. "I see as well as you do that things are working awry between Montie Gore and his wife. I've a wee suspicion about the cause. No, I'm not going to tell you what I fancy, child. I don't think I ever forbade you to do anything in my life."

"But you are going to now, John," interposed Mrs. Paynter, softly.

"No, I'm not. I've belief in your sharp little noddle, and wouldn't go that far; but I think, Lizzie, you will interfere to no good now, and might step in to good purpose later."

"I disagree with you, John. I must try to clear up this difference between them, providing, after a little, I find I'm right in my suspicions."

"What are they?"

"Ah! you would like to know, would you? Confidence for confidence, my husband."

John Paynter shook his head.

"What, you won't? Well, John, I think Montie is suffering from an attack of jealousy. Cissy, I can't make out,—unless it is she is indignant at being unjustly suspected."

"Look here, Lizzie; I believe in your friend, but I fancy Montague Gore has some reason in his wrath. If, as I tell you, Cissy is what I think her, it will come right without your putting your little nose into the business."

"It isn't so very small," exclaimed Mrs. Paynter, passing her delicate fingers reflectively over the organ in question.

"It's just the right size, and very pretty to boot, you vain woman," retorted her husband, laughing.

"You dear old John! that's a very sweet speech for you; but I've made up my mind."

"To interfere?"

"Of course."

"Well, Lizzie, I hope you will be successful; but I own I doubt it."

"Your wife, sir," she rejoined, laughing, and sweeping him a mock courtesy, "is a very clever woman, although you have never quite recognized the fact."

"I only know," said her husband, smiling, "that she always takes her own way, and usually says it is my fault when it proves a failure. I'm off to smoke," he continued, rising.

"No; smoke here," returned Lizzie.

"Not a bit of it, my dear. You want to discuss the Gores' case all night, and I've said my say."

"You ungracious old monster! Go and commit tobacco in your own den, then;" but the *riant* look that accompanied the speech showed that Lizzie and her husband understood each other much better than a short-sighted world usually gave them credit for.

Having made up her mind to interfere, the next question that presented itself to Mrs. Paynter was, on which side it would be most judicious to commence her attack. Womanlike, she thought she could do more with a man than with one of her own sex. Besides, Mrs. Gore had been somewhat cold towards her of late, and Lizzie wondered at times what was the meaning of that.

"She's piqued about something," argued that lady, "though what it is, I confess I don't understand. To see Montague alone in Park Crescent will be difficult, — what if I invade him in his chambers? A bold measure, certainly; but then, I rather like bold measures. It's my one chance, pretty well, of seeing him alone. I might ask him to come here and see me, it's true; but no, I like the other best; there's more fun in it. How it will shock one or two dear friends of mine if they should happen to hear of it!" and Lizzie gave way to a little laugh at the idea.

Montague Gore, as we know, had chambers in the Temple; they consisted of three rooms opening into one another. In the days they had been residential the outer of these had been his business-room, the next his sitting-room, the inner his bedroom. Since his marriage the outer room had been given up to his clerk, while the sitting-room had been turned into a waiting-room for clients, communicating with the inner room of all by a door, the upper half of which was of glazed glass, — glaze in some few places worn away so that it was possible to look into the inner room if a person were so minded. Gore had given orders once or twice that this glass should be freshly glazed, but so far it had not been attended to. A sultry afternoon, Mr.

Kinglake tells us, occasioned in some measure the invasion of the Crimea; it had been better for Montague Gore if he had never exchanged the old door for the glass arrangement.

Great was his astonishment when one afternoon his clerk brought in Mrs. Paynter's card, and intimated that the lady wished to see him.

Of course he welcomed her cordially, at the same time expressing a hope that nothing unpleasant had procured him the honor of this visit.

"Well, I don't know," replied Lizzie; "we shall see when we look into things. So this is the hole in which you make all your money; like John's, it would be considerably improved by the inroad of a housemaid with a lot of soap and water."

"Heaven forefend! we should never be able to find anything."

Mrs. Paynter, meanwhile, was quietly noting the aspect of the place. Owing to Gore having lived there previous to his marriage, it contained more furniture than is usual in chambers not residential. Especially did Mrs. Paynter's eye linger on the picture over the writing-table, of which we have before heard. She wondered who it might be, but she remembered, though rather indistinctly, that there was a tragedy connected with Gore's life, and forbore to inquire.

"I don't think much of your den, Mr. Gore, and that's the truth!" she exclaimed, after a little; "but I suppose you smarten it up a bit when Cissy comes to lunch with you."

"She never does," replied Gore, curtly. "Wives seldom invade their husband's place of business, I should think."

"Oh, yes! I do now and then, for one. But I wanted to see you upon something of importance, — important to me as to all your friends; still more important to you. Can you guess what it is?"

He shook his head, and looked blankly into her face. She eyed him keenly for a moment, then exclaimed, abruptly: —

"What is wrong between Cissy and you?"

He started. What! it was common talk, then, among their friends that he and his wife did not get on together? He paused a few seconds, and then replied: —

"Nothing. What can you mean?"

"That's not the truth, Montague, — there is," replied Mrs. Paynter, quietly.

"If Cissy has made you the confidante of her grievances," he rejoined, sharply, "you know more than I do."

It stirred him to anger to think that his wife should confide in this woman, — she who would not confide in him. To his jealous temper this was intolerable. Mrs. Paynter was evidently here as his wife's ambassadress.

"Montague, don't mistake me so cruelly. Cissy never opened her lips to me on the subject; but to one who knows you both so well as I do, it requires little sharp-sightedness to see there is something amiss."

"I suppose," he returned, roughly, "there's a seamy side to most married life. It was not likely I should be more fortunate than my neighbors. I dare say you and

John Paynter have found the springs of the domestic chariot get a little out of order upon occasion."

"John and I understand one another," replied Lizzie.

"I should like to hear what he says about it!" exclaimed Gore, rudely.

"He's more courteous to a lady than you, at all events!" cried Mrs. Paynter, springing to her feet. "I came to help you if I could. You meet me with distrust, and are downright bearish besides. I will go."

She looked very handsome in her wrath, as she stood there, her head thrown slightly back, and her blue eyes sparkling with indignation. She was very angry with this man. He had refused to flirt with her in days gone by, and a woman never forgets that; now he was refusing the loyal friendship and help that she proffered. She turned, and walked swiftly to the door; but ere she reached it he overtook her, caught her hand, and exclaimed: —

"Forgive me, Lizzie! We cannot part like this. Pardon a man who has good reason to feel somewhat embittered. Come back and sit down."

He had never called her by her Christian name before. In his excitement he was scarce conscious that he had done so now. It was odd, but that slight incident roused the ever-ready spirit of coquetry within Lizzie's breast. She turned round upon him, and, as the anger died out of her face, said, softly: —

"I thought, Montie, you could never really mean to treat an old ally like that."

He was somewhat taken aback by this abrupt transition from indignation to tenderness. Still he was as yet too much intent upon learning what she might have to say to pay much attention to it.

If Montague Gore was anxious to hear Mrs. Paynter's revelation, there was one just arrived at the other side of that glazed door who stood petrified at the sound of her voice.

Cissy had been about to knock at it when Mrs. Paynter's angry tones fell upon her ears. She could not catch the words in the least; but she felt sure it was a woman's voice. She thought she recognized it. Cissy paused.

By one of those caprices which we of the West call chance, and the Easterns fate, a business telegram had arrived for Montague Gore just as Cissy was stepping into her brougham. She determined to take it to him herself. On arriving at the outer door of her husband's chambers she found it ajar. No response being made to her knock she pushed it gently open. The room was empty, the clerk having slipped out on some temporary business of his own or his master's. Similarly she made her way into the next room, and was about to tap at the glass door when her hand was arrested, as above-described.

"You are making three great mistakes, Montie," said Mrs. Paynter, smiling, as she resumed her seat. "First, you won't believe in my friendship, and you ought, you know. Secondly, you should always believe in a woman's help, if ever you get into a scrape with another woman. Men don't, I know; they always will consult one

another; and what a mess they do make of it, as a rule!" and here Mrs. Paynter gave a most expressive shrug of her pretty shoulders.

"But I have repented of those two heresies," said Gore, earnestly; "I accept your friendship, and will listen to your advice. Still, I am utterly ignorant of what it is you would talk to me about."

"And they call us hypocrites," observed Mrs. Paynter, parenthetically. "You know very well. Will you answer my question? What is wrong between you and Cissy?"

"I don't know — nothing — something — everything. God help me! I cannot understand her."

"You should have let some of us teach you the windings of a woman's mind earlier," replied Mrs. Paynter, archly, and favoring her companion with a most coquettish flash of her blue eyes. Though honestly working in Cissy's behalf, she could not resist the temptation of flirting a little bit on her own. "And now I am going to tell you your third mistake, — you don't believe in your wife."

"I do!" cried Gore, vehemently.

"No, you don't. You're jealous of her," replied Lizzie, demurely.

"Jealous of whom, pray?"

"How should I know? Jealous without cause, I can swear. Your wife loves you very dearly."

"You think so?" inquired Gore, looking straight into his companion's eyes.

"I'm sure of it; better than she loves any one in the world."

Montague Gore paused, and remained for some few seconds lost in thought.

What was Cissy doing all this time on the other side of that glazed door? Her conduct, perhaps, is hardly to be defended; but bear in mind her husband's change of manner had troubled her much of late. Who was this lady, she wondered, with whom he was closeted, the faint tones of whose voice, when raised, had seemed familiar to her ear? Suddenly she espied a place a little above her head from which the glaze had been a little worn off. She seized a chair, and in another second she was looking into the room, and had recognized Lizzie Paynter.

"You honestly believe this?" said Gore, rising, at length. "I doubt it."

"You're mad, Montague; I swear it. Women don't often make a mistake about such things;" and as she spoke she rose and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Bless you for the assurance, anyway, even if it should turn out you are mistaken. How can I ever repay your kindness?" he continued, taking her hands in his.

Not a gesture of all this was lost upon Cissy. She could not hear what they said, but she had an excellent view of the speakers.

The very devilry of coquetry possessed Lizzie at that instant.

"Pay me," she cried, laughing. "Yes, that is new. You lawyers always exact a fee; I shall take one," and as she spoke she leant forward towards him, and her eyes looking up into his said plainly what that fee should be.

Montague Gore bent his head and laid his lips lightly on her cheek, and a thrill of

gratified vanity ran through Lizzie's veins. It was a poor and unfairly won triumph, but she had made this man succumb to her at last in some sort.

Cissy saw it all. She sprang from her chair, and sped with light foot and aching heart to her carriage. She knew now what it was to love. She knew at last that she loved her husband.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CISSY LEAVES HER HUSBAND.

Mr. Fox Brine has returned from Nottingham, somewhat discomforted. He has vindicated his bold assertion that he would find Hemsworths. He has — more than a dozen of them; but he is quite aware that he has not found the Hemsworth that is wanted. Also does Mr. Brine labor under the unpleasant consciousness of having been, in some measure, outwitted. He reflects, ruefully, that those hard-headed denizens of the Midlands are endowed with vast capacity as regards liquor-drinking generally, and gin-punch in particular. He resolves mentally not to measure himself again on that point, with Mr. Turbottle, at all events. That the peripatetic merchant could have afforded him all the information he sought, he entertains no doubt. In his exceeding acuteness he thought to take Mr. Turbottle at disadvantage, and we have seen what has come of it. Now he has, for the present, lost all clue to that worthy. He has vanished after his wont, leaving an address behind him, not being at all a habit of Mr. Turbottle's.

"You see it all depends upon your circumstances," that gentleman was wont to remark, with a grin, whenever this little peculiarity was alluded to. "When you're expectin' haunches of wenison, tickets for the court balls, and no end of legacies, you can't be too particklar about letting 'em know where you are. But when it's likely folks only want to point out half-crown brooches aint the standard gold they supposed 'em to be, and that genuine mother-of-pearl trifles have a good deal more mother than pearl in 'em, why, you see, it's as well parties shouldn't communicate. It leads to unpleasantness, which is what I never could a-bear."

When Mr. Brine goes down to Gore's chamber to give an account of his stewardship, he is afflicted with considerable misgivings concerning his reception. He is not the least afraid of bitter commentary on his proceedings; but he does think that he has laid himself open to a good deal of badinage. He reflects that he did crow rather loud that evening in York Terrace, and he has not much to show in confirmation of such bragging. But he need fear little raillery from Montague Gore at present.

Gore can discover no sign of Mrs. Paynter being justified in her assertion. On the contrary, Cissy behaves towards him with a measured coldness, little calculated to convey the idea of deep affection. Believing in the first instance that Lizzie might be right, he had made one determined effort to break down the barrier that had grown up between them; but Cissy became more freezing in her manner than ever.

He was dealing with a proud woman, fiercely jealous, — a woman who had suddenly awoke to the fact that she loved for the first time; while, simultaneously, she was given proof that the man she loved was carrying on an intrigue with her most intimate friend. That he was her husband, and that as such she had a claim on his affections, operated but slightly on Cissy's mind.

Her first marriage had not taught her to put much faith in that obligation. But she had learned to hold Montague in high estimation; and now it seemed that she had been his dupe from the commencement; that his protestations of love were all false; that his heart, all the while, had been given to another. It seemed to Cissy that she had been the victim of an abominable plot.

Blinded by her jealousy she conceived the hideous idea that her marriage with Gore had been a concerted affair between him and Mrs. Paynter, for the better concealment of the intrigue he was carrying on with that lady. It is true that this was jumping at a conclusion upon rather insufficient grounds, but women seldom form their opinions logically. Indeed, when jealousy begins to reason, self does not make much difference; we always hold a brief for the prosecution in such cases, and admit no evidence save that which tends to a conviction.

It was little likely Cissy would soften towards her husband in her present frame of mind. She was torn by conflicting emotions. If she was to be a mere nonenity, a simple cloak to his illicit love for another, why had he so strenuously sought her love since she had become his wife? Cissy had not deceived herself upon this point; her husband had been her lover up to this time. If he had married her as a mere mask to his intrigue with Lizzie Paynter, then their wedding-day saw that end accomplished, and further wooing was only likely to embroil him with his mistress.

She herself, too, in admitting her want of love for him, gave him fair grounds for omitting the attentions of a lover; and yet Cissy knew well she had no ground for complaint on that score. Could it be that this intimacy with Mrs. Paynter was but an old *liaison*, which he wanted courage to break up? No, that was not the case, else Mrs. Paynter had probably interfered to prevent her marriage; and she well knew that Lizzie had done her best to promote that. No, her first conjecture was the true solution. This man whom she had so looked to and esteemed was falser, meaner, baser, than those with whom her early life had been spent.

And yet she loved him. She could not disguise that from herself. Though she inwardly raged, though she despised herself for the miserable weakness, though she believed that he had deceived her, that he had whispered love words into her ear false as dicers' oaths, that he and his paramour perhaps even laughed at her miserable infatuation, still she could not tear him from her heart. Can a proud woman suffer greater torture than to feel that she has poured out the precious spikenard of her love on one who but mocks at the gift? Cissy is beginning to think she can live no longer beneath this man's roof.

Montague Gore, meanwhile, is slowly resigning himself to the inevitable. His

dream of happiness is over. To the first bitter regret of conceiving this woman's love can never be his is now added a fierce feeling of resentment at her injustice.

She has, he tells himself, thought proper to quarrel with him for expressing disapproval of her conduct, on a point in which he would have been borne out by most men. No husband would acquiesce in his wife holding clandestine meetings with a man of whom he knew nothing. He attributes Cissy's behavior entirely to their conversation of a few weeks back.

He has, of course, no idea that she witnessed the conclusion of that interview with Mrs. Paynter, or even he must have admitted that she had some reasons for her jealousy. But he is in ignorance of all this. His wife's feelings are a sealed book to him. He has no suspicion of the counts upon which Cissy mentally arraigns him. He would be thunderstruck at hearing all she has to allege against him. So the breach between them widens rapidly, and has by this attained such dimensions that it may well be doubted whether it will ever be bridged again.

Fox Brine, on repairing to his friend's chambers to render an account of his mission, is struck with the change in Montague's appearance. He may well look ill. To stifle the thoughts that rage within him he has had recourse to his old panacea, — hard work; and he has carried it to that point where Nature begins to resent the unfair strain placed upon her. He is conscious himself that he is rather overdoing it. That extreme lassitude, those constant headaches, — he has experienced them before, and he knows what his doctor said then: "Off with you to the seaside at once; don't touch a pen, nor do more than glance at a newspaper. Do nothing for two months; the brain wants to lie fallow a while."

He listens attentively, though, to Brine's account of his proceedings, but by no means thinks it conclusive that Mr. Turbottle is in a position to give them the information they require.

"The man, you see, Fox, is such a charlatan by profession that he was quite likely to affect knowledge he did not possess, when he saw you anxious for information on the point."

"He knows all about it," returned Brine, doggedly.

"Well, he apparently won't tell it drunk, whatever he may do sober."

"None of your chaff, Montie. It is not given to mankind, generally, to put away punch after the fashion of Mr. Turbottle. Confound him! he seemed only to get more sober with every glass he took."

"And you didn't, eh?"

"No, you're quite right, I did not. But I tell you what, old fellow, you're not looking yourself; overdoing it again with respect to work. Why don't you knock off and go away somewhere for a little? Doesn't Mrs. Gore think you want change of some sort?"

"Oh, I'm all right; a little fagged, that's all. I've had a great deal to do lately," replied Montague, wearily. "I want more money, too, now I'm married."

"Well, you know your own business best; but remember what the doctors told you

before. It's false economy, besides. Driving the engine too hard always involves damage to the machinery; and then you have to lie by for repairs. In the mean time I intend to devote all my energies to the recovery of the lost Turbottle. When I find him I shall be able to clear up that settlement question for you," observed Brine, rising.

"I doubt it; but still we are dead-beat about the Hemsworths, and I can't, just at present, think of anything else. Good-by."

Mr. Brine pondered a good deal over his friend's looks as he walked homewards.

"That wife of his is answerable for them in some measure, I'll be bound," he muttered. "I fathomed that woman the first time I saw her. Very handsome, very false, was my verdict, and she is— I wonder what I ought to do, knowing what I know. 'When in doubt about speaking, hold your tongue,' is a good, safe maxim, and I'll stick to it for the present; and yet it seems like disloyalty to my oldest friend, for the sake of shielding a worthless woman. Pah! how could she let that scoundrel's lips soil her cheek, if she had a shred of respect for herself left? It's a bad business, very; and I devoutly wish I was in happy ignorance of the whole affair. What a fool I was to miss that train!"

Little did Cissy, brooding over her own imagined wrongs, think what judgment was being passed upon her. Little did she dream that she was pronounced as false to her husband as she conceived him to be to her, and upon almost identical evidence. She would have been perfectly aghast if she had known that Fox Brine had witnessed her parting with her father, and drawn deductions of her conduct similar to those she herself had come to concerning her husband, from witnessing the conclusion of his interview with Mrs. Paynter. As before said, it never occurred to her that the major might be deemed her lover to those having no knowledge of their relationship. The idea was so preposterous that she might well be excused for never thinking of it; and yet it was no unwarrantable conclusion for Brine to arrive at, or for her husband to have grave suspicion about.

During the next few days Cissy suffered severely. She raged inwardly. It seemed to her that all was false; that all around her were in league to deceive; that she was the mere puppet of a designing intriguante, the dupe of a heartless man. And yet how she did love this man! She had awakened to this knowledge too late; no, too soon,— she ought never to have done so. Had she not loved him it had been easier to bear. Lies, lies, lies, she was surrounded by lies.

In vain did Mrs. Paynter call; Cissy obstinately refused to see her. That lady was mystified past conception. If she had indulged in her habitual coquetry for a moment, of a surety she did not flatter herself that she had made any impression upon Montague Gore's heart, nor did she desire to do so. She honestly wanted to set things straight between husband and wife; and the incorrigible flirt little knew what had come of her endeavors. She wrote to Cissy; her letters remained unanswered.

It was true Cissy's first impulse had been to reply in exceeding bitter terms, and let her see that she knew all. Then she thought of an interview, in which she might

pour forth all her scorn and indignation on her rival's head. But ever came back the dread reflection, she can laugh in my face, she is a *successful* rival. Then rose the fierce thought of revenge; of telling John Paynter all she knew, or, to speak more correctly, imagined she knew. But Cissy reflected that would probably only result in throwing her rival into her husband's arms. An elopement, she conceived, the probable result of such exposure.

What was she to do? To live in the midst of all this deception was intolerable. She could never bear again to see her husband even talking with Mrs. Paynter; and, intimate as they were, it would be impossible, she thought, to postpone that for long. How idiotically blind John Paynter must be not to see all this! And yet he could come out with his blundering remarks about her proceedings. Great Heaven! why did he not pay some slight attention to his wife's?

Should she consult her father? No, this was a thing she must think out for herself. He had told her she was independent; that she had money of her own. Thank God! she could go and owe nothing to her husband. "Yes," she thought, "it must be so. I will leave him. I shall be better away; anything is better than to live such a life as we do now. I did it before; but then I did not love. Now, alas! I do;" and Cissy wound up with a passionate fit of tears.

Once this idea has entered her head, and Cissy begins to turn it over pretty constantly, she becomes impatient for action. Yes, she will go, and she thinks without explanation. She is quite aware that her husband has the power to prevent her leaving, unless she could produce rather more evidence against him than she can lay her hands on at present. She has no doubt of his guilt, but still she feels that her story might not be so convincing to others as it is to herself. She can imagine specious explanations given by a couple so well versed in duplicity as those two. She has an impression, somewhat vague, it is true, but nevertheless rather strong, that her father, if she consulted him, would counsel her to pause. That would be intolerable; she feels that it would cover her with shame now to admit how passionately she loved her husband.

No, she will go without saying a word to any one, and leave a letter behind her for Montague, stating her discovery of his perfidy, and her determination to live with him no longer. Where shall she go? Brompton-super-Mare will do as well as any place. She will write to her father when she gets there.

Montague Gore, returning home weary from his work a day or two later, is astounded, instead of finding his wife, to find this letter:—

"That I can no longer consent to live beneath your roof will surprise you little, when I tell you I know all; that I know what a mockery your pretence of love has been from the very commencement; that I am aware now that our marriage was intended but to cloak your *liaison* with another. I would have been a true wife to you, Montague, if you would have trusted me. It seems that I have been your dupe all along. The love you professed for me you had not to give; your heart was

already another's. I deserved better at your hands than this. My secret was, at all events, an innocent one, and capable of explanation.

"For you! I have witnessed your treason with my own eyes. To explain away what I have seen is impossible. There remains for us only separation. A woman must be indeed lost to self-respect who would consent to play the *rôle* you have marked out for me. You need fear no disclosures at my hands, unless you drive me to them. I ask but that we should part silently and forever.

"Your wife that was,

"Cissy Gore."

Montague Gore read this letter over some three times; he was white even to his lips as he did so. At length he thrust the paper into his breast, and if there had been a physiognomist present his verdict would have been that this man was dangerous. When men turn white with passion, it is usually in consequence of the violent repression of emotion. The anger that can be pent up is of the kind that resembles the mountain torrent, in contradistinction to the brawling brook. When it bursts its banks, it is hard to face or to stem.

"I understand what you have written?" he muttered. "Not in the least, save this: you have what you term an innocent secret capable of explanation; and explain it you shall, by Heaven! and so shall your co-partner also. If his story be what I suppose it, you will part silently and forever with one of us."

It was well Cissy could not see her husband's face, as he read that letter of hers. Few who knew Montague Gore could have guessed what fierce passions ran beneath his habitual calm, self-contained manner. It was excessive love impelled Othello to slay Desdemona. Such paroxysm of jealousy is impossible save to those who greatly love.

Gore at this moment was in the state in which men are capable of great crimes,—when they deal out what they deem justice, and the world calls murder in somewhat reckless fashion. Quite possible, had he met Cissy and her father at this present, they had died before he thought of demanding that explanation he spoke of. Professional training stands in small stead when passion has mastered us, and we pass sentence on our own convictions without troubling ourselves concerning evidence or investigation. That his wife had eloped with the mysterious stranger Gore never doubted. The charge against himself he was so utterly at a loss to interpret that he put it down as one of those vague accusations we make at times to justify our own wrong-doing.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MAJOR'S ADVICE.

CHARLIE DETFIELD is experiencing those pleasing sensations which probably accrue to a man who finds himself speeding down stream to Niagara Falls, — no possibility of reaching either bank, — nothing to do but sit still, watch his boat increasing its pace every hundred yards, and listen to the awful roar of the cataract destined to engulf him. The fate of those who go down to the sea in ships has its parallel in those who float down life's river on "bills." There are direful shipwrecks in both cases. Detfield's bark is getting ominously nigh the breakers. He bids fair to shoot his Niagara before many days are gone by.

The somewhat impersonal Simmonds, controller of Charlie's most serious liabilities, is beginning to wax vehement for a settlement. To see that money-lending shade has apparently become an impossibility, but he is very active by post; threatening all kinds of proceedings unless his urgent thirst for ready-money is immediately assuaged. Again and again has Charlie sought the money-lender's den, with a faint hope of inducing Shylock to grant a little respite. Shylock is always away in the city, say his clerks, striving to raise a little money on his own account, for such a dearth of the precious metal had not been experienced for many years. Mr. Simmonds is terribly in want of funds, say his well-instructed subordinates; engaged in one or two financial schemes that require perpetual feeding.

Although Simmonds may be impalpable, his lawyers are not, and it has become quite evident to Detfield that his liberty is of doubtful tenure. We all know that imprisonment for debt is abolished; but then you see you can be ordered to pay, and committed for contempt of court if you do not. As the probability, in such cases, is that a man does not pay because he has not the money to do so, he goes to prison for contempt of court instead of for debt; a distinction which one trusts is, in some shape, soothing to his feelings, although there seems a marvellous similarity between the new law and the old.

It has never occurred to Detfield that his quarrel with Roxby can have had anything to do with the harshness of Mr. Simmonds' proceedings. Although he had fairly wooed and won Bessie for herself, without an idea of her being an heiress, yet, if he could have met the ruthless money-lender, he would probably have pleaded that, as some inducement for him to stay his hand. But Mr. Simmonds had his own game to play, and had no intention of having an interview with his debtor. Suddenly it struck Charlie that it would be a wise thing to go and have a talk with Claxby Jenkens.

"Can't possibly make things worse. I don't see how I could do that if I tried. I've been a fool, and suppose I must pay for it; but it is a little rough on a fellow that

his smash should come just as he has persuaded the sweetest girl in England to be his wife; and to think that she has money, after all. That old scoundrel Roxby was right the other evening. I can't afford to wait. If I could, I might marry Bessie, and stick to the old corps besides, perhaps; but Simmonds means to have his own forthwith, as far as he can get it; that means selling out, as far as I am concerned."

Detfield was not particularly sanguine that any good could come of this interview; but we all know what preposterous chances we play for when the world is going against us. A chance this, quite of the Micawber type; a trust that something might turn up.

As he ascended the dingy stairs leading to the major's office, in John street, Adelphi, Charlie reflected moodily that Claxby Jenkens had always disclaimed any intimate knowledge of the money-lending fraternity. That he usually prefaced his discourse with, "Don't borrow," and concluded with, "Well, if you will, or must, so and so (in his case, Simmonds) will let you off as cheap as any one; but he'll make you pay pretty high all the same." To the latter part of his speech being strictly veracious, Charlie could bear testimony.

The major received Detfield with his accustomed urbanity, and waited quietly till he should please to open the business upon which he came. To tell the truth, Claxby Jenkens was a good deal puzzled what this visit might portend.

"He can't be such a fool as to suppose he can raise more money," thought the major. "If he has been successful in his wooing, Roxby will, of course, pull him through. If he hasn't, he must know it's all up."

The major, therefore, contemplated Charlie, through his spectacles, with no little curiosity.

"I want to have a talk with you, major," said Charlie, endeavoring to settle himself comfortably in the straight-backed office-chair.

The major's chairs were not designed with a view to comfort.

"Comfort produces confidence," quoth that astute practitioner. "Confidence is rather inimical to the favorable transaction of such business as mine."

"I am very much at your service for fifteen minutes," replied Claxby Jenkens. "After that, you'll excuse me;" and he laid his watch upon his desk, as a significant hint to his visitor to say what he had to say at once. "What is it?"

"First, I want Simmonds, who is now pressing me very hard, to give me a little more time."

"My dear Detfield, I have told you from the commencement I have no control, in any way, over Simmonds, in his business transactions. I can only say, from what I know of him, if he wants his money, you will have to furnish him with a very good reason for consenting to wait a little longer. He don't, as a rule, without seeing some benefit in prospective. You've had a chance. Why the deuce didn't you take it?"

"The chance meaning, I presume, that I should win the hand of Miss Bessie Stanbury?"

"Just so," replied the major, shortly, and gazing inquisitively at his companion from beneath his spectacles.

"Well, I have. I am engaged to marry Bessie Stanbury."

"Then what on earth do you come to me for?—I who can be of no use to you, when Roxby, her guardian, can put things straight with Simmonds in ten minutes."

"Roxby and I have quarrelled. Roxby is an unmitigated blackguard."

The major could not refrain from an ejaculation. This was so exactly what he thought might take place that he could not resist a triumphant exclamation. Nevertheless, he considered it behoved him to know how this quarrel had come about. Moreover, it was considerably to his pecuniary interests to bridge it over, if possible; and yet, for a downright pull over Roxby, the major felt he would sacrifice a good deal.

"Hard words, libellous words, my dear Detfield," he replied, softly,—"words that require justification of some sort. Roxby, remember, has the credit of an upright man of business."

"No doubt. I fancy you've a good many in the city of the same kind," replied the guardsman, dryly. "Held fine men of business, because they make money, but viewed in a somewhat different light by the public, if it ever happens to transpire how they do it. Roxby is one of these. He proposes to *sell* me his ward."

It would be absurd to suppose this astonished the major. Without positive knowledge, yet he had never doubted that Roxby meant to make capital of Bessie Stanbury's hand in this fashion.

"Might I inquire the exact terms in which the proposal was couched?" asked the major, blandly, so far forgetting himself as to push up his spectacles, and allow his keen eyes to gaze straight into Detfield's.

"Yes. He asked five thousand of Bessie's fortune as the price of his good-will."

"Ah!" ejaculated the major,—"and you?"

"Told him what I thought of him in the plainest possible English."

The major rubbed his hands thoughtfully.

"What! seventeen and a half per cent., my dear Roxby, on the whole plunder," he mused; "and ten per cent. to me on your share of it. My worthy friend, I don't think you were too liberal to your partner."

"Should you like to know, Captain Detfield, what I think of this?" he continued, speaking aloud.

"That's precisely what I have come to learn."

"Well, I think you have been very foolish. Stop, don't interrupt me. I'll admit, if you like, that Roxby is a rogue. He is, and a deuced clever one to boot. But if you mean to marry Miss Stanbury you had better make friends with—let us say the Mammon of unrighteousness. If you don't, I'm afraid you'll find it go a bit hard with you. Quite possible, I think,—mind, I don't know,—that he has some influence with Simmonds."

"I have told him my opinion of him, and I'm not going to gainsay it," retorted Charlie, doggedly.

"Now don't be absurd. Roxby is not the man to let passionate words stand in the way of business. I fancy he has heard an unfavorable estimate of his character once or twice in his time. Dear me! it occurs to all of us. I have had harsh language levelled at me before now, although I try always to do my duty towards my neighbor. They would perhaps venture on more; but an old soldier, as you know and others know, understands how to curb license of speech."

The easy urbanity with which the major uttered this sentence was delicious. It was suavity concealing the pistol; that punctilious courtesy that so often preceded the bitterest quarrels in the old duelling days. True, the major has lived later than those times, but also he has lived much abroad, and justified his luck at *écarté* on more than one occasion in the field. In years gone by, Claxby Jenkens had been well known at Spa, Homburg, Baden, etc., as a fortunate gambler, and one ever ready to dissipate any misunderstanding of the card-table with a hair-trigger.

Charlie listened to this address with no little astonishment. He had his own opinion concerning the major's military antecedents, and considered his claim to the title he bore of very dubious character. Still he had not come there to quarrel with Claxby Jenkens. He was quite full enough of troubles without embarking in more.

"Roxby has taken his line, and I have taken mine," he said gravely, after a little. "I am not going to begin by swindling my wife that is to be, out of five thousand pounds. I'd sooner never wed her, than win her on those terms. We must wait;" and Charlie rose to go.

"Just, of course, what you can't afford to do. Simmonds will devour you, body and bones, before three weeks are over your head, and you will have lost what it's difficult to receive, — position."

"What must be, must," replied Charlie, sententiously. "I've been a fool, but I'm not going to keep what you call position by being an utter blackguard. Good-by."

"Well, remember that I have given you the best advice I could, and that I think you very foolish for not following it; but I do rather like your pluck, and if ever it lies in my power to do you a turn *in re* Roxby, you may depend upon me."

"Thank you," replied Charlie; "but that's rather a thousand to fifteen chances, I'm afraid."

"You're right, it is; but should I tell you to back it, do. I don't play Roxby till I've a very strong hand. Good-by."

It was curious that a cool, cautious man like Claxby Jenkens should allow himself to be carried away even thus far, and commit himself to antagonizing a man who had so invariably proved too much for him as Roxby. Yet this is often the case; the shrewdest speculator cannot resist the bias of a special enmity. Men will sacrifice their own immediate interests in the prosecution of a good quarrel.

The lawyers could tell strange tales of money lavished on the contention of rights of way, or similar cases, which mattered really but little to the belligerents, though

they were fought out to the bitter end with an animosity that caused utter oblivion of the cost of battle.

So Claxby Jenkens was thoroughly prepared to sacrifice time, money, and other advantages, should he ever perceive a successful opportunity of entering the lists against Roxby. He had over-reached him two or three times. Let him look to himself if ever he, the major, held the cards.

Claxby Jenkens sat with his head resting on his hands for some minutes after his visitor had left him. He was turning over in his mind what it was possible that Roxby might have been guilty of, with regard of this trust of Bessie Stanbury's. He knew his friend Roxby well, and thought it quite probable he had dipped pretty deep into his ward's fortune already.

"Five thousand he wants assigned to him right out, and five thousand or more, at least, is probably invested in some straw and waste-paper speculation, the shares of which are down at zero. I'd give a good deal to know who is his fellow-trustee. He must be a nonenity, or Roxby would never dare propose such a nefarious game as this to Detfield. Ha!" he chuckled, "I should like to have seen my esteemed coadjutor's face, when the guardsman cut up awkward. Over-play, that, my dear friend; rattling out your trumps without knowing your partner's calibre. Passing the king is awkward, when the man going shares with you calls attention to the same. For once, my friend Roxby, I knew more than you. I could have told you that because a gentleman's broke, it don't always follow he's turned blackguard. I could have warned you that Detfield must be sounded delicately, certain to break away from clumsy handling. You fish with very strong tackle, and don't waste time over landing your victims; but then you see you have the hook pretty deep in their gills as a rule. When it comes to a light line, and really playing a fish, I think I've the best of you. Yet you had fair reason to suppose that Detfield was struck pretty deep. I guessed his temper better than you, though, and could have told you to be careful how you opened the trenches. Well, we shall see what comes of it; but, if ever, my esteemed partner, you happen to be on the end of my line, I'll make you acknowledge I can handle a rod."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AUNT MATILDA SIDES WITH THE LOVERS.

Miss Matilda, now she has accepted the fact of Bessie's engagement, is of course enthusiastic about it. She pooh-poohs Aunt Clem, and takes the whole affair under her immediate protection. When her sister and Bessie hint that they have fears about what Mr. Roxby may say to it, that Charlie is nervous on this point, Miss Matilda literally stiffens in her skirts, and replies that she presumes her opinion will have some

weight with that gentleman. That she has thought it over, that it is the height of imprudence for a girl to choose a husband from one of the vagabond professions must be allowed; but Bessie has done so, and therefore there is no more to be said.

"If the chit chooses to run away from her foolish old aunts, — you needn't hem, Clementina, you're getting on, — and die upon what somebody calls India's coral strand, — though if it is all coral I don't know why coral should be the price it is in the shops, — still she shall have the satisfaction of thinking in her last moments, and after pointing out the extreme folly of her engagement, we did the best we could for her, on ascertaining that she would not listen to reason."

To which species of half-support, half-badinage, Bessie usually replied with laughter, caresses, and promises of Indian shawls, if ever she should really proceed to the East.

"But you know, Aunt Matilda, Charlie is in the Guards, and they never go to India, or abroad, except on service," Bessie would observe.

"My dear," Miss Stanbury would retort, solemnly, "we're always fighting somewhere. We're always putting somebody to rights, and if somebody objects, well, then we send the soldiers to point out how ridiculous he's been, whether it is in Africa or Abyssinia; and when we've killed a king or burnt a capital, we boast we're extending civilization. And as for you — well, you're going to marry one of these apostles of civilization, and think just because he happens to belong to a home regiment that he will stay at home. Pooh, child! when he gets tired of your pretty face, he'll be like all the rest of them, and turn secretary or aid-de-camp, or volunteer, or something — I don't know what; but he'll be off to where the science of killing is being carried on, depend upon it."

But when, some two or three mornings after the announcement of her engagement, Bessie came down to breakfast with a pout on her lip, the suspicion of a tear trembling on her lashes, and a telegram in her hand, Miss Matilda raised her head, and exclaimed: —

"Mercy upon us! what ails the child? He's not ordered to Singapore — wherever that may be — yet, is he?"

"No, aunt, dear, don't tease me to-day, please. This is from Charlie, he can't be here to-day to explain himself, because he's on duty; but he telegraphs to say that Mr. Roxby will not hear of his marrying me. But I will, in spite of ten thousand Roxbys, if I wait ten years for him," and Bessie stamped her little foot on the carpet, threw back her head defiantly, and looked a nineteenth-century heroine all over.

If you think there are no heroines in silken garments, you mistake greatly. There are plenty of women who drive their carriages, and mix in good society, who suffer mutely, silently, and live more heroic lives than those who gain the badge of heroism in a few hours or minutes of passionate excitement: —

> "For the mark of rank in nature is capacity for pain,
> And the anguish of the singer makes the sweetness of the strain."

"O Bessie darling, I am so sorry," cried Aunt Clem. "We must have a good talk at once over things. True love, alas—"

"Don't believe in obstacles or whimpering," interrupted Miss Stanbury, tartly. "Yes, we must have a talk, as you say, and that pretty speedily; but not the sort of talk you mean, Clementina. I intend to have it out with Mr. Roxby before many hours are over my head. I mean to know why he takes it upon himself to reject a proposal for my ward's hand, without consulting me. Bessie is my ward as much as his."

"Of course I am!" cried the girl; "and we will go together, Aunt Matilda, will we not?"

"Hum! my dear, I don't know about that. I think perhaps I had better see Mr. Roxby alone in the first instance. It would be the more proper thing, you know."

"Yes, aunt," replied Bessie, softly, as she insidiously nestled herself into Miss Stanbury's ample skirts; "but you know it would be the more practical thing to give me a chance of also expressing my opinion."

"Girls of your age are not supposed to have opinions," retorted Aunt Matilda, laughing.

"But they have, and pretty strong ones too, when it comes to whether they are to give up a lover or not," said the girl, with an emphatic little nod of her head. "Don't you be afraid, mine aunt; I'll be as still as a mouse till you've said your say. But when it comes to resigning Charlie, I mean to speak out."

"And what do you mean to say, Bessie?" inquired Miss Clementina.

"That I won't," replied the girl, stoutly.

"Very good, my dear!" observed Miss Stanbury. "That's laconic, and to the point. A great matter in women's argument, to say nothing of men's."

"But do you suppose you two will put down Mr. Roxby?" said Miss Clementina, in somewhat quavering tones. "You know he is so very decided, Matilda, dear."

"I don't think," said Miss Stanbury, addressing an imaginary audience, "that I have been usually considered weak in character. Of course I admit that we are not, as a rule, judges of ourselves; but still I think, pardon me, Clementina, that I generally hold my own."

Aunt Clem, knowing that, as far as she was concerned, this was most indubitably the case, cordially assented. As for Bessie, feeling conscious of having wound Aunt Matilda round her finger many times, she did not endorse this statement with quite the enthusiasm Miss Stanbury deemed it required.

"You've doubts, child?" she asked, sharply.

"Say, rather fears, aunt," replied the girl, sadly. "You are very kind, but I am only afraid Mr. Roxby may prove too strong for you. He holds great power, you know, as far as I am concerned at present."

"Pooh! he will listen to me," retorted Miss Stanbury, pluming herself.

"He wouldn't listen to Charlie," exclaimed Bessie, dolefully, reflecting, with all a woman's faith in her first love, that the pleading she had found so irresistible herself must have succeeded were success at the command of human tongue.

She knew nothing of Mr. Roxby's views of a suitable partner for her hand.

"Don't you think, aunt, it would be as well to wait until I have seen Charlie, before we speak our minds to Mr. Roxby?" observed Bessie, shyly, after a short pause.

"Well," exclaimed Miss Stanbury, "this may be prudence; but if this is being in love, I intend, miss, to study the phenomenon. The girls of my time did not give away their hearts in the off-hand way you have thought proper to do, but when we did, we gave them with a will. We felt, — we, we in short, —."

"Were positive volcanoes," cried Bessie, with a merry laugh.

"Nothing of the sort, little impudence!" replied Miss Stanbury, joining for a second in her niece's merriment; "but we loved in real earnest."

The girl looked at her aunt for some few moments. Miss Matilda's face had softened, and the sharp, dark eyes gazed dreamily back into days long gone by. Little doubt, as that silence stole over her, that Miss Stanbury conjured up a love-dream, bright once as her niece's was now, which had never been realized. Bessie read the saddened, serious features aright, and forbore to interrupt the thread of those old memories. If she had entertained any doubt, the nervous, anxious glance with which Miss Clementina regarded her sister would have convinced her that she was right, and that her stately, even still handsome, aunt had gone through a serious, though unfortunate, attachment.

"Well, child, perhaps you are right," remarked Miss Stanbury, at length. "It would be better on the whole, I think, to hear Charlie — hem! I mean Captain Detfield's story."

"Call him Charlie, Aunt Matilda; he's to be your nephew, you know."

"No, my dear, I don't know; but, if it's any satisfaction to you, I'll own I hope he may. There, that'll do," she continued, in reply to somewhat vehement caresses on Bessie's part. "On my word, I think you're mistaking me for him."

"Aunt Matilda!" cried the girl, springing to her feet, with her cheeks all aflame.

"Pooh! pooh! Don't look so shocked, you little prude, as if kissing and courting didn't always go together. You can take yourself off now; I want to talk with Clementina."

The two Misses Stanbury differed considerably about this forthcoming interview with Mr. Roxby, — the subject of their conversation after Bessie had left the room. While Miss Matilda announced her intention of carrying matters with a high hand, her sister earnestly deprecated any such course. She pointed out that Mr. Roxby, suave as he was in manner, had always been very firm and dictatorial whenever it had come to a matter of business, and adjured Miss Stanbury to speak him fair. But that lady, without reason, had allowed herself to attain white heat — if it may be so described — on the subject, and had no notion of anybody disapproving of this marriage save herself. It was clear Miss Matilda meant to disburthen herself. Having set her face against the engagement, in the first instance, like all renegades, she was now a fiery partisan. She panted to give somebody, or anybody, who objected to

it, a bit of her mind. Miss Stanbury had never been known to have that craving long without there being found a recipient of that oration.

Great was the excitement when Captain Detfield was announced the next day. That usually nonchalant officer could not but be aware of a rustling disappearing skirts upward as he himself ascended to the drawing-room. There he found Bessie alone.

"Come and tell me all about it, Charlie," she exclaimed, their first salutations over. "And mind all, everything. I must know all; and remember it makes no difference."

"I hope not, darling, further than that you will have to wait. You'll do that, won't you?"

"You know I will. But what did Mr. Roxby say?"

"Oh, the old story. Of course he knew I was broke, and no match for you; could not think of consenting. The old stock-comedy guardian all over. He hasn't produced another wooer credited with his support, has he, Bessie?"

"Not much use if he did," said Bessie, with a toss of her head. "But that is not all, and I want to know all."

Now this was just what Charlie had been puzzling his brains over for the last twenty-four hours. Was he justified in telling his affianced what a precious scoundrel she had for her guardian? — that the respectable Mr. Roxby was quite as willing to deal for the disposal of her hand as if he had been a slave-dealer on the White Nile or at Tunis. It was not that he had the slightest compunction about exposing Roxby, but he shrank from inflicting on the girl he loved what must necessarily be a painful and alarming explanation.

He knew thoroughly what little power he had to watch over her; that even his very liberty was almost a toss up; that the morrow might see him arrested for debt. But, supposing it did not, how could he interpose between Bessie and her guardian? All this had troubled Detfield considerably since that unlucky dinner in Gordon square.

The girl watched his face, while he still hesitated. Those that love are quick to read the features of those who hold their hearts. She saw the doubt with which he struggled. What it was she knew not, but it was clear as daylight to her that her lover debated in his own mind whether he should tell her all that had passed between himself and Roxby.

"Charlie, dear," she said, softly, at length, "surely there should be no secrets between us two. Am I not entitled to know all?"

"Of course you are, Bessie; but forgive me if I pause a little. I'm bothered, child; I can't make up my mind whether you had better know this or not."

"I feel I'd better know, and woman's instinct rarely deceives her. What is it?"

"Can you promise to hold your tongue about it, — not to mention it either to your aunts or Roxby, — if I tell you?" demanded Charlie, looking down into the sweet, earnest, loving face that now rested against his arm.

"Yes, I promise," she said, simply.

"Then, Bessie, all I can say is, that your hand is a mere matter of sale;" and with that he poured into her ears the story of Roxby's proposition.

She spoke not a word till his story was finished. Then she rose, with face pale, calm, and resolute.

"I'm in the hands, Charlie, it seems, of a very consummate scoundrel; but, my darling, I shall never blench from my troth. We may have to wait; but he cannot interfere with me much. My aunts will see that I'm not bullied; and, though a man who would propose what he did to you is not likely to stick at trifles, I don't think he can annoy me to any great extent. But I want one thing from you," she continued, looking earnestly into his face.

"What is that?"

"Release from that promise."

"Certainly not," replied Detfield, hastily. "Think for a minute, Bessie. It will only complicate affairs much more. It is far better that both you and your aunts should assume no such knowledge. Let them do anything they like, but never allude to that. It can do no good."

"Aunt Matilda and I, Charlie, intend to have it out with Mr. Roxby almost immediately. Aunt intends to know upon what he grounds his objections."

"Very little trouble about replying to that, sweet. And you, Bessie?"

"I intend to tell him I will marry no one else."

"Well, confine yourself to that statement. But, believe me, Roxby is a dangerous man when affronted. I'm not sure whether I shan't pay due penalty for telling him what I thought of him. We won't let it go further."

"It shall be as my lord wills," smiled the girl, as she dropped her head on his shoulder.

But at this juncture Miss Stanbury, having heralded her coming by a most unnecessary altercation with the door-handle, presented herself.

"Well, Captain Detfield," she exclaimed, sharply, "you've been kicked out, Bessie informs me; sent about your business by Mr. Roxby. You don't look much like a case of rejected addresses either."

"And don't feel it," replied Charlie, laughing, as he shook hands. "I've too good friends in the citadel to despair, one of the most important of which is—"

"The girl herself," interrupted Miss Matilda. "Yes, I know you were going to say something pretty to me, and now Mr. Roxby has put my blood up by his cavalier treatment, you can put me down as on your side. You are a very bad match for her all the same, you know."

"Aunt! aunt!" exclaimed Bessie.

"Yes, he is, child; and quite aware of it."

"Thoroughly. I've only one thing to say, Miss Stanbury,—I had no idea she was an heiress when I asked her to marry me."

"I know you hadn't,—another instance of the folly of man. I wonder how you proposed to live. Never mind; I like you even for that very foolishness, Captain Detfield, and intend to fight your battle for you as far as I can."

Detfield bowed, and Bessie kissed her aunt.

"Well, sir," resumed Miss Stanbury, laughing, "you're a soldier, and know that we mustn't complain if the opening of the campaign looks a little against us. Make this girl a good husband if we win, and I'll ask no more."

"Of course he will," said Bessie, calmly; thereby, with all a woman's tact, relieving her lover from an awkward protestation.

"Ah, my dear," retorted Miss Stanbury, "I'll hear what you've got to say a twelvemonth after your wedding. If we didn't all think that in your stage of proceedings, we should never get married."

It was not likely that Detfield or Bessie would attempt to reply to this speech; but that you can talk without speaking is a fact, however much you may laugh at the phraseology. The girl's lips syllabled, "Tell her all;" and Charlie replied by a quick nod of dissent.

This little telegraphing did not escape Miss Stanbury, but she forbore to notice it.

"Bessie, Captain Detfield, has no doubt told you my intention of seeing Mr. Roxby immediately in your interests, and you, I presume, have acquainted her with all that it is needful for her to know."

"Yes, and I cannot express my thanks for the way you are standing my friend on the occasion."

"No thanks, sir. We'll shake hands after the battle's won, and I've already told you how to repay me. But remember, Matilda Stanbury has never been a lukewarm friend, and she's taken a fancy to you, I don't know why. Excuse an old woman's joke, but I really think it is because you happen to be the greatest scapegrace she was ever acquainted with, and that you have fallen in love with the greatest torment she was ever afflicted with;" and before the assailed had time to reply, with a ringing laugh Miss Stanbury had left the room.

"Your aunt's a brick, Bessie!" exclaimed Detfield, as the door closed. "I should like to buy her something, if I only knew what."

"Good Heavens! don't appeal to me," laughed Bessie. "I assure you, the advent of her birthday occasions me weeks of thought."

"Well, good-by; I shall reflect upon the subject. Meanwhile, we'll pin our faith on Aunt Matilda."

"Yes, and you must believe in Bessie, too, you know."

Charlie, having replied in satisfactory fashion to this last observation, took his departure.

A tendency to shower gifts upon those who have pleased us is very common. The difficulty of selecting a suitable present is, it may be presumed, an interposition of Providence to prevent our exceeding our incomes. We ponder this weighty question so long that the time goes by, and eventually we give nothing but those *liberal intentions.*

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHICH ABOUNDS IN PLAIN SPEAKING.

THERE are many people who can decide quickly enough upon the course they intend to pursue, but shrink, dally, and delay when it comes to active measures. They want nerve to face the unpleasantness which the line of conduct their judgment urges them to adopt necessitates. If ever it was your lot to witness the levée of one with power in the land, you must, while waiting, have seen many instances of this in the antechamber.

Of modest merit with powerful claims, shivering at the thought of confronting the great man; of reckless self-assertion, without the slightest grounds for demanding what it requires, tripping jubilantly, hopefully, into the great man's room, and returning either triumphant, or not one whit cast down by failure. It is there the justice of the world is meted out somewhat hardly. It is always odds on confidence *versus* modesty. Again, confidence is always willing to try its luck over again, while the man wanting in faith in himself falls back appalled by the first rebuff.

Painful places those antechambers, wherein sit the supplicants for the loaves and fishes. I can remember a public office in which one sat who always reminded those whose duty or necessity it might be to confer with him, of an ill-disposed mastiff on the chain. He apparently deemed that his position required him to be ill-tempered; that discourtesy to his inferiors asserted his dignity; that insulting those who had to transact business with him impressed them with a sense of his power and ability. Where he may be now, I know not, — making himself disagreeable, probably, in the Elysian Fields; but a jubilant cry went through a large profession when he seceded from office.

Miss Stanbury was a woman of decision, and one who liked to carry out her views as quickly as might be. Once her mind was made up to confront Mr. Roxby, and support Charlie Detfield, she thought the sooner she and Roxby, in her own homely phrase, had it out, the better. That Miss Matilda was a little blind, in the ardor of her partisanship, to the weakness of her cause must be admitted. She knew nothing of her co-guardian's nefarious proposals; and, putting that on one side, there could be no dispute that Mr. Roxby was only doing his duty by his ward in setting his face against this marriage. But Miss Matilda, when she took a thing up never did it by halves, and penned a note next day, requesting Mr. Roxby to call and confer with her upon serious business, at his earliest convenience.

That gentleman was not surprised in the least at the summons.

"Of course, the young villain has got round all the women," he mused; "Bessie, naturally, head over ears in love with him, — a girl is pretty sure to commit that weakness when she ought not, — I, represented as the tyrannical guardian, and her

aunts, romantic as all elderly spinsters are, determined to take the part of the young people. Ordinary course of events that. What I should like to know is, whether the young fool has thought proper to blurt out my proposition? Who could have dreamt of a man in his position presuming to be virtuous? Well, I intend him, at all events, to learn that virtue requires self-sacrifice, and is its own reward. Three or four weeks in a sponging-house will probably modify his notions considerably. I ought to have waited till he was there before I spoke. Yet how could I guess that idiot Jenkens would make such a mistake in his man?—that one so utterly ruined would not snatch at the plank that promised safety?"

That Charlie Detfield should have taken the line he did was utterly incomprehensible to Mr. Roxby. He had dealt with men in difficulties many times, and was too conversant how the tone of morality lowers, under such circumstances, not to believe that the guardsman would have closed willingly with his proposal.

Roxby had fought his way out of too many delicate situations in his time to feel in the least uneasy about confronting Miss Stanbury. On the contrary, he jumped at the proposed interview; would, indeed, have requested one, just to feel how the land lay, had Miss Matilda not taken the initiative. One of his maxims was to be aggressive; to meet attack half-way and carry the war into the enemy's country, if possible. Miss Stanbury had, no doubt, a good deal to say; well, she would find that he had still more. There certainly had never been serious dispute between them as yet, and it was impossible to say how such might end if it should happen. Still he recollected with considerable satisfaction that the lady had mostly followed his advice or suggestions in the past without discussion. Was it likely she would prove troublesome now?

Miss Stanbury had promised Bessie that she should be present at this interview; but, when the thing became definitely fixed, the good lady got a little nerved. She remembered Mr. Roxby's cool, terse, logical way of putting things, and decided that she would see him alone in the first instance.

"I shall send for you, Bessie, rest assured; but I think it best Mr. Roxby and I should have a private confabulation to begin with."

"Very well," returned her niece; "but mind, you promise that I shall see him before he goes. I must tell him my determination regarding Charlie. I wish him to know that from my own lips."

"It shall be as you wish, child," replied Miss Matilda; "but if I can't win the battle for you, do you suppose you will turn the tide?"

"No; but Mr. Roxby will thoroughly understand, after he has heard what I have got to say, that, at all events, he need not sanction any other pretender to my hand."

"Oh, yes, my dear," replied Miss Stanbury, a little sharply (her bristles were up in expectation of the coming conflict); "of course, you must say your say; descant for ten minutes on Charlie's manifold perfections,—he's simply a harum scarum, ruined soldier, you know,—and then wind up as I'm told they do at the theatres, with the terrible avowal that 'you never, never, never will be another's.'"

"Aunt Matilda, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" cried Bessie, passionately.

"I know I ought, my dear; but I'm afraid, in a common-sense point of view, it should be for taking your part."

"O aunt!"

"There, don't be afraid. I have pledged my word, and I'll stand by the soldier,—my colors, I suppose I should have said. Now run away; Mr. Roxby should be here almost immediately."

A few minutes later, and that unctuous gentleman was shaking hands with Miss Stanbury, and inquiring anxiously and impressively concerning the health of herself and her sister; so earnest, indeed, in these inquiries, that one might have almost surmised he contemplated a closer connection with one of them, or, at least, had a vested interest in their living or dying. This was Mr. Roxby's way, and it is astonishing how far this feigned anxiety about your friend's health will carry you. An absorbing concern regarding an uncle's gout has been known to produce a favorable codicil to the nephew ere now.

"Of course, Miss Stanbury," said the financier, their greetings over, "you wish to see me about this unfortunate infatuation of Bessie's?"

"I don't call it an unfortunate infatuation," replied Miss Matilda, sharply.

"Then, my dear madam," observed Roxby, with a deprecatory smile, "you must allow me to ask what you do call it. Of course, it has sprung into life without your sanction, and I can conceive you much troubled at discovering what had happened. A sad business, very!" and the financier shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't intend to admit it is a sad business in the least," returned Miss Matilda, speaking rapidly, and truth to tell a little shrilly. "The man is a gentleman—ay mark me, a thorough gentleman; he's of good family, and the child is in love with him; of course we know he's in debt; but Bessie can pay those for him, and they will still have enough to scramble along on."

"Do you mean to say that you are advocating the attack of the greatest reprobate in the Household Brigade on your niece's fortune? Surely I cannot understand you aright?"

Miss Stanbury was perfectly aware that she was advocate to a weak case, but when a woman takes up a cause the last thing to put her down is argument.

"Yes," she said, "I do. First, I deny that he is anything like the reprobate you assert him to be."

"Living here at Islington, you would, of course, have every opportunity of forming your judgment on that point," interposed Mr. Roxby, sarcastically.

Miss Matilda reddened at the taunt.

"I know a gentleman when I see him," she replied in heightened tones, "and I know a man in love when I see him. I dare say he's sown a pretty crop of wild oats like many of them, and has yet to pay for their garnering; but he loves Bessie thoroughly, and if he marries her I have no fear but that he will go on steadily for the future."

"Excuse me, Miss Stanbury, but the reformation of the rake by matrimony has

always been a most favorite hallucination of your sex. You must pardon me, if I cannot agree with you. Men are apt to regard it as a very dubious experiment. I can only say, I should regret to see Bessie make a trial of it."

"You object to this marriage?"

"Now really, you know, my dear Miss Stanbury," replied Roxby, with a benignant smile, "you are jesting with me when you ask such a question. How can you expect a business man like myself to consent to his ward's marrying a broken spendthrift?"

"Well," said Miss Matilda, "I wish it, and intend to promote it to the best of my ability, there!" and Miss Stanbury drew herself up in her chair defiantly.

"Quite evident now," thought Roxby, "that Detfield has kept silence concerning my proposition. My hand is strong; it's time to play out trumps and have done with this."

"Of course I regret," he said gently, "to be compelled to take an opposite view of this matter from you; but the world will undoubtedly support me. I must at once put my decisive veto on any engagement between my ward and Captain Detfield."

"In defiance of my express wish to the contrary?"

"I can only regret that what I presume is your womanly interest in a love affair prevents your beholding this specious impostor in his true colors," replied Mr. Roxby, suavely.

"He's not an impostor," cried Miss Matilda, hotly. "He never made any disguise about his difficulties from the first."

"It is useless to prolong the discussion," returned the financier. "I have given you my decision, and intend to abide by it. I will now say good-by;" and Mr. Roxby rose.

"Stop," exclaimed Miss Matilda, as she rang the bell; "I promised Bessie that she should see you."

"For what good?" he demanded. "Surely you might tell her what my intentions in this matter are."

"She wishes to speak her own mind on the subject," replied Miss Stanbury, dryly.

"Really, I have no time to listen to the lamentations of a love-sick girl, and must beg to be excused," returned Roxby. But ere his hand could reach the door, it opened and Bessie appeared.

"How do you do?" she said, in a slightly nervous manner, but with a haughty carriage of her head that arrested Miss Stanbury's attention at once. There was a defiance in the girl's bearing, such as her aunt had never seen yet. It did not escape so shrewd an observer as Mr. Roxby; outwardly that gentleman was bland as ever in his salutation; inwardly he muttered, "She knows all. The fool couldn't keep it from his sweetheart, of course. I might have guessed as much." But, with all his old theory strong upon him, Roxby resolved at once to come to the point.

"No use, Bessie," he said, "wasting time about why you want to see me. I've talked over the whole affair with your aunt, and told her, as I now tell you, that I cannot give my consent to your marrying a man in Captain Detfield's notoriously embarrassed

circumstances. I am very, very sorry to have to thwart your wishes; but I should be false to my trust if I decided otherwise."

A most paternal speech, and past all objection, supposing you did not know the inner life of Roxby, and of what that brilliant financier was capable.

"I intend, Mr. Roxby, to dispose of myself," replied the girl, proudly. "It is well you should know this at once; well you should understand this poor hand is not on sale to the highest bidder. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly!" rejoined her guardian, with an easy smile. "You mean to marry for love, not money; foolish from my point of view, of course, but young ladies of your age are apt to be romantic, — to neglect substantial benefits for a day-dream."

His diplomatic speech puzzled Bessie.

"I have pledged my troth to Captain Detfield," she continued, after a slight pause.

"So I am grieved to hear. When you are of age it will, of course, be in your own power to carry out that preposterous engagement," replied Roxby, blandly. "But there are a good many changes take place in our opinions in three years. Quite possible that Captain Detfield may deem his circumstances require a wealthy bride in a very much shorter period."

The girl's eyes flashed with anger, as she replied: —

"At all events I trust him, and can wait."

"No doubt," retorted Roxby. "You are young; can afford to wait. He can't."

"You don't know Charlie," cried Bessie, as the angry blood rushed tumultuously to her temples.

"Hum! fairly, I think. A broken-down guardsman, endeavoring to avert ruin by marrying an heiress. Pooh! a very commonplace character."

It was rash of him to launch that taunt. He might have seen the gathering passion in the girl's face the last few minutes.

"Yes," she cried, all recollections of her promise scattered to the winds. "You do know him *now;* and he and I know you. You have discovered that, if he is ruined, he is not the unprincipled fool with whom you thought you had to deal; that he scorns to purchase his bride's hand with her own money. He has thrown your infamous proposal back in your own teeth, and given in plain language his opinion of you. Mine, sir, coincides with his."

"Doubtless," he murmured, with an evil sneer.

"His expressions were none too strong," she continued, passionately. "Whether you can work him harm or not, I don't know; but, if you can, you will most likely."

"You shall see, miss," he muttered between his teeth.

"Less than three years, and we shall be beyond the reach of your malice. Meanwhile, don't count upon my hand as negotiable in the money-market," and, with a bend of extreme dignity, Bessie withdrew.

As for Miss Matilda, she had sat open-eyed and thunderstruck during this stormy conversation. She had been actually appalled by her niece's vehemence. Since her childish days Miss Stanbury had never seen Bessie in such wrath.

As the girl left the room, she turned to Mr. Roxby to seek an explanation, and asked, "What does she mean?"

"Mean, madam?" replied Roxby, with lips white with passion; "that she is possessed of the most infernal temper of any young woman in England, and is the most infatuated idiot it has ever been my lot to come across."

"Mr. Roxby!" exclaimed Aunt Matilda, bristling with indignation at his coarse abuse of her niece.

But that gentleman simply muttered a curt good-day, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BROODING ON VENGEANCE.

MONTAGUE GORE, in his agony, is brooding over the wrong, the shame, that has come to him, in a fashion not unlikely to result in murder. The days of duelling are over in England he knows, and, even if they were not, his feeling at the present moment inclines him more to shooting down his wife's seducer, as if he were a dog. There are men, he is aware, who are quite content with the decision of the divorce court in similar cases. He has a horror of such scandal and exposure. The more he thinks over it, the more does he feel reckless of life and eager for vengeance. To slay this man who has stricken him, to kill himself, thereby avoiding a shameful death or a lifetime of agony, seems to his morbid mind what it is best for him to do.

Religion, moral principles, all forbid such action; but when a man, passionately in love with a woman, finds that she has betrayed him, I fear that he is wont at times to degenerate into the "wild barbarian" once more. The vehemence of passion tears our thin veneer of culture and civilization to tatters, and the fierce innate desire of man to right his own wrongs with his own right hand triumphs over the tardy retribution offered him by the law courts.

> "What reck'd the chieftain if he stood
> On Highland heath or Holy-Rood?
> He rights such wrong where it is given,
> If it were in the court of heaven."

And when that woman, moreover, is his wife, there mingles in his mind some legal justification for putting her seducer to death. He has brooded over this to such an extent, that a brace of Derringer pistols have found their way into one of the drawers of his writing-table, and a small box of cartridges nestles beside them. Still, before you shoot a man it is imperative to find out where he is. Montague Gore, as yet, is not only in ignorance of his foe's whereabouts, but also of his very personality. He has shut himself up ever since Cissy left him, — accessible only on business, — and has as yet taken no steps to trace the whereabouts of the fugitives.

It was not likely friends would intrude upon him under the circumstances. Honest John Paynter, it is true, has called, but only to be denied admittance; while his wife, after her asseverations that memorable day in the Temple, naturally shrinks from an interview with the stricken man. Lizzie, indeed, is too distressed and bewildered by the event to think of talking about it to Montague Gore. She cannot understand it. She could have sworn that Cissy loved her husband dearly. Little does she suspect how that little piece of coquetry of hers guided the march of events. Did she but know it, Mrs. Paynter would have been both sincerely distressed and surprised. More passionless kiss, Lizzie could have vouched, had never been dropped on woman's cheek; but, like our sins and the chickens, these illegitimate kisses are wont to come home to roost.

It so happened that Mr. Fox Brine, having conceived a new and brilliant inspiration, had forsworn society and his usual haunts for some days, with a view to working it out. This, with him, meant looking up sundry books of reference, making a great many notes, and then appearing languidly once more before his chums, and announcing, like Mr. Winkle, "for fear of taking anybody by surprise, that he was about to begin." His laughter-loving, literary associates always on these occasions remarked that he was looking ill.

"Yes, I've been in for a good deal of stiff work lately; getting the scaffolding together, you know," Mr. Brine would rejoin, solemnly.

"Ah! I see," returned one of that irreverent fraternity, upon his reappearance this time; "had another miscarriage, poor fellow!"

Fox Brine, though he felt somewhat angry, could not help laughing at the joke; besides, he knew well, to lose your temper at a jest in Bohemia is like passing sentence of excommunication on yourself. You will be assuredly laughed clear out of that vagrant country. Still, in consequence of that addled incubation, this nesting of eggs never destined to be hatched, Mr. Brine had not even heard of Mrs. Gore's elopement as yet. It was not so far town-talk; the knowledge of it was confined only to Montague's more immediate intimates.

But when intelligence did reach Fox Brine's ears, he posted off to see his friend at once. It was getting high time that Gore should see some one to whom he could unburthen himself. When a man passes his days brooding on murder, he rapidly drifts into that morbid frame of mind in which his ideas commence to take practical shape concerning the achievement of it. Gore is, in fact, thinking of little else. He sits for hours with business papers spread out before him. He reads the same paragraph over and over again, without the slightest comprehension of it. He dips his pen in the ink, bites the top of it vaguely; but the paper remains still unstained before him. His opinion has been called for on more than one case of importance, but it cannot be obtained. He has been sent for to two or three consultations, but he, usually so clear, lucid, and logical, seems like a man in a dream, unable to grasp the facts placed before him, with nothing to say when the affair has been well talked over by those joined with them in the suit. They shake their heads, these last, and

prophesy that Gore must knock off work, or break down. His domestic troubles have not as yet reached the ears of his *confrères* at the bar.

Brine had heard it through John Paynter, who shook his head more sadly over it than was John Paynter's wont about grievous tidings.

"Awfully cut up, I'm afraid, poor chap! he won't see me or any one," he remarked.

"He shall see me," returned Brine; "but who is it? That infernal blackleg, I suppose?"

"I don't know his name," replied John Paynter, "but it's the fellow I've seen her walking with once or twice, I presume, — a well got-up man, between forty-five and fifty."

"That's he, — Major Claxby Jenkens. I, too, saw him with her a few weeks back, and saw him kiss her. I argued with myself for a day or two whether to tell Montague or not; but the situation was so awkward, I thought I'd best not interfere."

"Pity you didn't, perhaps; still, I don't know. As you say, it is awkward, very, acquiring such knowledge."

Brine looked a little comically at his companion. He didn't know, it was true, a very great deal of Mrs. Paynter, but he had heard that she was a desperate flirt. It occurred to his whimsical brain that there might, perchance, have been an occasion on which somebody might have acquired similar knowledge concerning her. He little thought how true he had hit the mark, or who that somebody was.

When Brine got back to the Temple, he lost no time in walking across to his friend's rooms. In answer to his inquiry for Mr. Gore, the clerk hesitated.

"Yes," he said, "Mr. Gore was in, but had given strict orders that he was not to be disturbed; he was not at home to any one. Still, sir," continued the clerk, "I think he might, perhaps, see you," and then he hesitated. He, of course, knew Brine well.

"What is it?" inquired that gentleman, sharply.

"The fact is, sir, Mr. Gore doesn't seem quite himself. He's looking very ill, and we can't get him to attend to business as he should, and as he used to do."

"So I've heard; all right, he'll see me; take in my card," and, by way of preventing all opportunity of refusal, Brine followed his card closely.

Montague Gore was seated at his writing-table. As the door opened, he closed a drawer of it sharply, snatched up a pen, and then raised his head angrily. There was scant need of announcement, for Brine was in the room as the clerk gave his name, and could not help feeling shocked as he looked on his friend's haggard face. The dark eyes gleamed with feverish light, and the livid circles under them told a story of mental suffering, or reckless dissipation.

Brine knew well it was not the latter.

"Montie," he said, "I have come to have a talk with you."

"You've heard all, I suppose," replied Gore, in slow, measured tones, as the door closed behind the clerk, — "how the woman I married ate my heart first, and then

left me. Ah! with whom? — that's what I want to know. I'm not quite myself, Fox. I did think of sending for you. I'm not quite fit to manage this inquiry by myself. You will do it for me. No scandal, mind, -- quiet, yes, keep it very quiet. Just his name and where he is, that is all we want; never mind her, though, of course, she's with him; but it is he we have to do with. You'll have his name and address before two days are over. Eh?"

"I don't suppose they will be difficult to trace. The detectives will, doubtless, soon ascertain where they have fled to. But, my dear Montie, what is it you propose to do?"

"Kill him!" replied Gore, in a thick, hoarse whisper.

Brine could not repress a shiver; if ever he had conceived deliberate murder hissed from a human being's lips, he heard it now, — the fell rattle of the cobra before its spring.

"You cannot, in these days, — duelling is a thing of the past, remember."

"Pshaw! who talked of duelling? Who meets beasts of prey in a fair stand-up fight? — we kill them where we can, how we can. Look," he continued, rising, opening the drawer, and taking one of the Derringers from it, "if, when he feels this barrel pressed against his temples, he does not blench, then I'll at all events hold him a man, though a felon; that like the wolf he knows how to die; but my finger will not falter; never fear."

"Montie, my dear Montie! this is murder!" cried Brine, aghast.

"What if it is, sir? Do you think I'd not rather have lain dead with a bullet through my brain than feel it throb as it does this minute? Do you think that I would not welcome death sooner than endure the misery I do now? I live but for one thing, henceforth, — vengeance. Do you suppose I intend to chance that on the lottery of a duel?"

Before this tirade was over, Brine had become aware that Gore was scarce master of himself; that reason tottered on her throne; that, at least, his friend was possessed of homicidal mania; and that, but for the fortunate circumstance of his not knowing who it was that had wronged him, a terrible tragedy might have been done ere this.

Very evident, indeed, now, to Fox Brine, that Gore must be left no longer to himself, and it was with bitter hatred he thought of this woman, all worthless as he deemed her, that had supplanted the memory of his dead sister.

It is singular, at times, how averse the relations of a man's first wife are to his marrying again. They resent it fiercely, although with no valid reason to allege against his doing so. He took a daughter of their clan, and had no business ever to forget the honor the family did him when they received him into their bosom. That he should renew the nuptial tie elsewhere they deem an affront, and are wont to be highly prophetic in boding no good will come of it.

He would have admitted it to no man living; but there was a strong tinge of this feeling in the dislike that Brine had conceived for Cissy at their first meeting. In his

inmost heart he disliked the woman who had induced Gore to forget his dead *fiancée*. He, Fox, had been much attached to her, and the tragic mode of her death had invested her memory with almost heroic attributes in his eyes.

He was but a boy of eighteen when the catastrophe took place, and it had made a terrible impression on his boyish mind. We recollect so vividly the trials that occur to us in those days. He could recall the fair face, blanched and drawn with pain, although its loveliness had not been impaired by the fire-demon; the fearful ravages he had wrought had been confined to her body. He recollected Montague Gore bowed down with grief by that painful death-bed. Man of the world as he was, he could not but feel it a species of sacrilege that Gore should ever forget her who bade him so sweet and touching a farewell.

But it is not given to most men to sorrow for their dead till their lives be run, and no one could accuse Gore of forgetting his dead love lightly. Ten years had passed before he thought of gaining a woman's good grace again. Better he had never dreamed such a dream, think both he and Brine now, seeing what has come of this second venture.

"Montie, old fellow," said Brine, gently, at last, "you are not quite yourself, and must allow me to act for you in this business. Of course, the first thing is to ascertain where they have gone; that done, we must consider what next to do."

"It doesn't require much consideration," returned Gore, in those low, passionate tones, which are to shrill, querulous exasperation as blue lurid, forked lightning to the gaudy blazonry that lights the sky in August. "He must die."

"That," said Brine, "must be as I shall determine. I have no fancy to see you expiate the murder of the accomplice of a worthless woman on the scaffold."

"Who dares say she is worthless?" cried Gore, fiercely; loyal in his love still, no one but himself should traduce Cissy in his hearing. "She has fallen before the cunning wiles of some early acquaintance. Some scoundrel, perhaps, with a hold over her that we little dream. Think what a life she led in her old days. My God!" he continued, passionately, "if she could have trusted in me!"

"Don't deceive yourself in that fashion," replied Brine. "I am afraid you will find that Mrs. Gore is a woman not worth fighting about. Better trust to the more simple remedy of the divorce court, and be free of her, believe me."

"We will think about what is to be done with her afterwards. Your first business, remember, is to bring me face to face with this man."

"My first business," thought Mr. Brine, rapidly, "is to see that you do not, at present, obtain the slightest clue to who he is."

"Very well," rejoined Brine, "as soon as we have made that out, we will have another talk about it. Meanwhile, Montie, let me take charge of those pistols."

Gore gazed steadily at him for a moment.

"You think I would use them against myself?" he replied, quietly, at last. "Have no fear of that at present, Fox. I have a good deal to do before it will occur to me to die by my own hand."

But, in spite of this calm assurance, his dark eyes glittered with, if not incipient madness, what might well pass as such, and Brine felt that there was no one in London less fitted to be trusted with loaded pistols than his friend at this moment. But it was useless to argue. The duplicity of madmen is proverbial, and Brine saw at once that possession of those pistols could only be accomplished by stratagem. He knew he had a man verging on delirium to deal with. Best to get him home just now, and see what a doctor could make of him.

"Wants a pretty stiff opiate, I should think, to begin with, and a good deal of medical supervision to follow," mused Fox. "Come along home, old fellow; I'm going to take my chances of some dinner with you to-night."

"Yes, all right; but you must not linger over the claret, you know. You've heaps of people to see. We must know where they are to-morrow, or the next day, at latest," and Montague drew on his gloves with feverish impatience.

A clever physician, well-known to both of them, dropped in as they sat over their wine, thanks to a note from Fox Brine, and, when Gore sought his pillow, he had swallowed a powerful narcotic, of which he little dreamed.

"Trembling on the verge of brain fever," said the doctor, as he said good-night to Brine in the hall. "Mind he's carefully watched, and I'll be round again the first thing to-morrow. The morphia may save it, but it's just as likely to aggravate matters as not. Of course, if it fails to produce sleep, he'd better not have had it. It's the card to play, but I'm not very sanguine of its being successful."

Brine threw himself on a sofa, but before the sun rose he was called to his friend's bedside. Small doubt about Montague Gore's madness now.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AT BROMPTON-SUPER-MARE.

BROMPTON-SUPER-MARE was, after the manner of all watering-places, a little town wonderfully impressed with the idea of its own importance. It was a part of the creed of Brompton-super-Mare that you nowhere beheld so fine a sea, that no beach in England bore comparison with theirs. That they were fashionable and aristocratic it is needless to mention; no watering-place of the smallest pretensions was ever otherwise.

If cynical visitors hinted there seemed a good many strange people about, or that there appeared to be a good many bills of apartments to let up in its windows, Brompton-super-Mare replied contemptuously that it wasn't the season. It did not signify what the time of year might be, they made the same answer. The inhabitants believed firmly that they were thronged with fashionables when that happy period arrived. If the place was empty, or full of those who could be scarcely called of

society's *élite*, then it was obvious it was not the season, which you were assured was just over or just about to commence.

Brompton-super-Mare, when it did find a titled visitor within its clutch, made the most of him. The Brompton-super-Mare "Gazette" served him up to breakfast with the prawns every morning: "Arrival of His Grace the Duke of Dashborough," on Monday; account of His Grace's family, on Tuesday. It did his seats or "ancestral towers" — rather fond of that phrase the "Gazette" — when it got an opportunity; the next day some few episodes in his life followed, if with just a suspicion of scandal about them so much the better, and so things continued till the "Gazette" pronounced an oration on his departure, as is done over the departure for the next world of a celebrity in Paris. Of course the place had its promenade by the sea, where people passed and repassed, till they entertained considerable doubts as to whether they did not know each other intimately; where shy people made feeble but elaborate parade of really being off on business of importance, as if it was possible to have business of importance at Brompton-super-Mare.

The place had two vocations, — to idle and to ascertain the affairs of its neighbors; so important was the latter of these avocations, that the first had at times to give way to it, and Brompton-super-Mare worked harder than would be credited.

The appearance of a stranger, as may be supposed, attracted immediate attention; the residents, of course, all knew each other by sight. A strange face, if in the least attractive, became at once a matter of curiosity, and its owner had not to take many turns on the promenade before Brompton-super-Mare was diligently seeking his or her name. A stay of a few days, and it became imperative that the inhabitants should know the previous history of the new-comer as far as possible. It may easily be imagined that the appearance of so striking a figure as Cissy Gore set Brompton-super-Mare all agog. A handsome woman, richly dressed, and utterly unattended, — here, indeed, was food for speculation. Who was she?

It did not take the little place long to arrive at her name, and the fact that she had taken lodgings for a month or so in Denbigh Terrace; but further there was nothing to be learned concerning her. She lived very quietly, and was rather given to keep her veil down when out walking. Cissy might have remained a mystery to Brompton-super-Mare for a considerable time but for one thing, — she had communicated her address to her father, and in an ill-advised moment the major determined to run down and see her.

A few mornings more, and the watering-place was astonished to find Mrs. Gore continually promenading with a strange gentleman, — not her husband, was speedily ascertained, for he did not live with her, and was staying, indeed, at the Royal Hotel. Brompton-super-Mare felt there was something wrong, and it behoved them to ascertain the truth of it.

The hot weather and the dead season in London scatter the habitués of the clubs in all directions. To many of these the loss of their accustomed lounge is a sore deprivation. They do not shoot; they don't care about the Rhine or Switzerland, still they

must go somewhere; they hate the country, even if they are lucky enough to have free quarters awaiting them. They are essentially club-men. Banished by painting, cleaning, or it may be only custom, from their accustomed haunts, such usually seek the nearest approach to their elysium. The watering-place presents this, and also usually extends the attraction of a small club, not difficult to join temporarily for a man accredited from any one of the London establishments. Colonel Prawn had selected Brompton-super-Mare in which to pass his six weeks of exile. He, of course, got himself elected to the club there as speedily as possible, and became at once *au courant* with all the gossip of the place.

We have heard this gentleman before express opinions strongly unfavorable to the major. He was little likely to hold his tongue now. He knew certainly nothing very tangible about Claxby Jenkens, though there were ugly rumors afloat concerning him in the London world, with regard to play-affairs and other over-sharp transactions, — quite pegs enough for the colonel to hang his innuendoes upon.

He detested the major, and whispered quite enough concerning him to make Brompton-super-Mare regard him as possessed of a very tainted reputation indeed, albeit he had always just contrived to escape being kicked out of society altogether.

To Colonel Prawn the mystery of Mrs. Gore was intensely exciting, and he penned letters to all the scandal-mongers of his acquaintance concerning her.

"Doosid handsome woman, by Jove! What could have made her take up with such an old reprobate as Jenkens?"

The colonel was at least half-a-dozen years older than the subject of his abuse, and by no means as well preserved, looking his age every day, which the major certainly did not. But we never do see the encroachments of the fatal scythe-bearer on ourselves, keenly as we note them on our contemporaries.

If Gore was not a man of mark as yet, he was at all events in very good practice, and looked upon as likely to become so in his profession before many years were over. His sudden disppearance from work just before the long vacation, at a time when professional men find it all but impossible to get through their engagements, attracted attention. Then it oozed out that he was very ill.

Two or three intimate friends not only called, but asked if it was possible to see Mrs. Gore for a few minutes. They were informed thas she was not there, and that the master of the house was down with brain fever. Strange that a wife should be absent from her husband's bedside at such a time! There were too many conversant with the real state of the case for the affair to remain a secret long, and, ere many days were over, it was whispered about that Mrs Gore had fled from her husband's roof; but with whom was still a question. In due course this intelligence reached the ears of one of Colonel Prawn's correspondents, who immediately imparted it to that gallant officer.

"Wheugh!" ejaculated the colonel, as he perused his letter. "A handsome woman like that, and actually bolted with old Jenkens! Well, she might have done better, one would think;" and that improper old warrior pulled up his shirt-collar, winked

at himself in the glass with a bloodshot eye, and looked altogether a very fit model for Silenus.

Here was a dainty bonbon to take down to the club. For one day at least, Colonel Prawn meant to be the lion of that establishment. Although his correspondent's information was of the briefest, and he owned he had no notion of who was the partner of Mrs. Gore's flight, yet the colonel felt he knew all the particulars, and could supply the smallest details from the stores of his imagination.

He certainly had fair grounds for suspicion, but it might have struck him as singular that having eloped together they should be living apart. Little likely, though, that the colonel, with such a tit-bit of scandal to communicate, should sift the truth of it very closely.

Before the sun went down, Brompton-super-Mare was aware that the purity of its promenade was sullied by the presence of a runaway wife and her paramour; Brompton-super-Mare felt, truth to tell, a little relieved. It had been so convinced that there was something wrong about that Mrs. Gore, it was quite comforting to know at last what it was, though it couldn't well be worse.

As old Mrs. Mufflington remarked to her special crony, Miss Vilejuice:—

"I always said, my dear, that there was more brazenry than beauty about that woman."

Cissy, with her frank, free carriage to be accused of brazenry! Cissy, with her pride so cruelly wounded by what she deems the discovery of her husband's perfidy! Cissy, who has awoke to her passionate love for her husband only to see how she has thrown her heart away! What will she say when this shall come to her ears?—when she shall find that the world holds her a degraded, worthless woman, false to the vows she took upon herself but a few months back? Cissy has got a lesson to learn, to wit, that it takes a marvellous short time for a woman to lose a reputation.

Cissy was extremely miserable, she yearned so for tidings of that husband she had deserted. She knew now how very dear he was to her, and though he had wronged her grievously, still she could not but love him. Her father, too, had somewhat staggered Cissy in her justification of the line of conduct she had thought proper to pursue.

The major—after hearing as much of her story as she thought fit to disclose, she could not bring herself to tell him the exact grounds of her jealousy—shook his head, and hoped she had not been hasty.

"It would have been better, I think, Cissy, to have had some talk with your husband first."

"Impossible!" she replied; "he could not deny his infidelity; to discuss such a subject could only be painful to both of us. I could have forgiven him all, if he had not taught me to love him," she concluded, in a low murmur.

Fox Brine had taken complete charge of his friend and his affairs, and no sooner had he procured satisfactory nurses, and seen that all the appliances of the sick-room were in thorough working order, than he determined that the next thing was to ascer-

tain what had become of Mrs. Gore. Nothing could be easier; so little mystery had Cissy made of her elopement that she had even taken her maid with her; the maid had since written to her fellow-servants, and therefore it was known amongst the household that their mistress was at Brompton-super-Mare. Much as he mistrusted Cissy, still Brine did feel that this sounded hopeful. "It may be only some misunderstanding, after all," he muttered; "of course she's been foolish, but perhaps not criminal. Confound it! a woman don't elope so publicly as she seems to have done. As for poor, dear Montie, the doctors say the fever must run its course; he's likely to be some days yet before he comes to himself. I wonder whether Mrs. Gore knows how ill he is. Hang me if I don't run down to Brompton-super-Mare, and, subject to circumstances, tell her."

Having come to this decision, Brine lost no time in carrying it out. Brompton-super-Mare was barely two hours from London; a little more than three and Brine was safely deposited thereat. Mrs. Gore's address was easily attainable, and Fox Brine was speedily on his way to Denbigh Terrace. Mrs. Gore was out, but would be in to luncheon. Would the gentleman leave his card? No; but he would call again.

To kill time, Brine turned on to the promenade, and, before he reached its end, encountered the lady he had come to see, escorted by Claxby Jenkens.

Cissy bowed as they passed, and felt her cheeks tingle, as she marked the stiff, curt recognition with which Brine returned her salute. She saw now, how her husband's friends regarded her conduct, clearly. She was prepared for it. She knew too well that in cases of separation each side has its own partisans. She was too proud also to make her story public in her own justification, and therefore quite resigned to have society's verdict registered against her.

As for Fox Brine, with a stifled implication, he made the best of his way back to town, believing the worst possible things concerning Mrs. Gore and her proceedings.

It so happened the major followed his example the next day; his numerous schemes requiring the master-hand to keep them going.

Forty-eight hours after, Mrs. Gore received the following note: —

"6 Charles street,
"Wednesday.

"DEAR CISSY, — Your husband is very seriously ill, and has been for about a week. Is your quarrel such that it forbids you to go to him now? Mind, he is in danger; I know for certain.

"Ever your affectionate father,

"CLAXBY JENKENS."

"Montague ill! Montague in danger and I here! God forgive me!" cried Cissy, passionately, as the tears welled into her eyes. "Justine, I am going to town by the next train. You will wait here till I write you word what to do."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

COLEMAN'S.

CAPTAIN DETFIELD, the last few weeks, has been going through all the last agonies that prelude the final crash. Legal intimation has been given him several times that, unless he pays divers sums forthwith, further proceedings will be immediately taken against him. Further proceedings have been taken, which seem to lead to yet further operations to his detriment. He is summoned, threatened, cited, and finally informed that, in default of his putting in an appearance, judgment for execution and costs has been given against him for £947 17*s.* 6*d.*, at the suit of Simon Simmonds; and that if the aforesaid sum is not paid within eight days he will be committed to prison for contempt of court.

"As my raising a thousand pounds is about as practicable as flying, I am afraid I shall have to incur the penalty," mused Charlie. "Legal fiction, I presume, or else I don't see the use of a court of law ordering you to do what it is clearly manifest you are incapable of doing. That villain Simmonds holds another bill, too, which, though it originally represented £300, will, I presume, cost six before he would part with it. I wonder what would put me square; take about five thousand, I suppose. Well, I've been a fool, and must pay for it. Comes hard, too, just now. Poor Bessie,—I had no business to speak to her."

Detfield understands thoroughly that a few days more and he is tolerable certain to be arrested. He has procured leave; and yet, instead of placing his affairs in the hands of a man of business, making the necessary arrangements for leaving his regiment, and then betaking himself to the Continent, or some other obscurity, till such time as his friends can come to some sort of terms with his creditors, he still hangs on in London.

He cannot tear himself away from Bessie Stanbury. He argues he has still four more days left; and so he continues to pass all his afternoons at Rosencath House. The ladies there have unanimously elevated him to the rank of a martyr; and not only is this graceless spendthrift petted by his *fiancée*, but even Miss Matilda thinks it necessary to make much of him.

Very angry is Miss Matilda with Roxby for refusing his consent to her niece's marriage; that he supported his decision by irrefutable arguments only made that lady still more wrathful.

"As if a woman's instinct wasn't worth more than a man's reasoning," quoth Miss Matilda. "But I have not quite done with Mr. Roxby yet;" and here the good lady would shake her head, and look so very mysterious, that Aunt Clem and Bessie entertained shadowy hopes that Miss Matilda had some subtle design in the background, destined to cover the inflexible Roxby with confusion.

As may be supposed Miss Matilda had sought an explanation concerning the accusation Bessie had hurled at Roxby in that memorable interview of a week ago; and the girl had told her aunt frankly what had taken place between that gentleman and Charlie: how that his consent might have been easily purchased had Charlie been as great a scoundrel as himself; how the two had quarrelled over the rascally proposition; and how Charlie had told Mr. Roxby, in the plainest possible language, what he thought of him.

Miss Matilda's amazement knew no bounds; that the decorous, respectable Roxby should turn out such an unscrupulous villain; that his specious arguments should be all a sham, and that his ward's hand was simply for sale as far as he was concerned, shocked Miss Matilda greatly. She wrote Mr. Roxby a most severe letter on the subject, in which she pronounced him unworthy of the trust reposed in him.

Mr. Roxby took no manner of notice of this epistle. Henceforth, Miss Matilda, as before said, gave vent to mysterious hints about "not being quite done with Mr. Roxby." On two points the ladies were unanimous: that Roxby was a monster, and that Charlie Detfield had behaved most nobly.

Poor Charlie! — he had only acted according to his training, and behaved like a gentleman; but how the women who love us can glorify our most simple actions.

The blow so long expected descends at last. Charlie Detfield has not got fifty yards from his rooms one morning, when he feels a hand upon his shoulder. Turning sharply to confront his assailant, he find himself face to face with a shiny-hatted, slovenly-dressed man, who carries his calling impressed legibly on his countenance. No necessity for his gruff "Prisoner, captaing," to tell Detfield what he is. He grimly exhibits a strip of parchment, and then says, sententiously: —

"Cab, of course, captaing?"

Detfield nods, and his taciturn captor hails a passing four-wheeler, in which they place themselves.

"'Spose you'll go to Coleman's? — they mostly does," remarked the officer, in an abstracted manner, as if wearied of speculating where they went to, after his villain hand had once been laid upon them.

What Coleman's might be, Detfield did not altogether understand; but he conceived it were as well to leave his destination to his captor for the present.

The cab, meanwhile, rumbled along slowly eastwards, and, after a drive of something over half an hour, stopped in a narrow, dingy street, somewhere off Holborn. Here the officer got out, rang at a low door-way, and called upon Detfield to follow him. Charlie eyed the house with unmitigated disgust: a tall, mildewed-looking building that had not been touched by the painter for very many years; the windows, too, appeared to be equally innocent of soap and water for a similar period; one peculiarity about them was, they were all barred. But here the opening of the door cut short further criticism on the exterior of Coleman's, and Charlie followed his guide up a narrow staircase, hearing the ominous clang of the massive lock behind him as he did so.

Arrived at the first floor, his guide threw open the door of a good-sized, but dingy sitting-room, and, muttering something to the effect that Coleman would be there directly, withdrew.

Thus left to himself, Charlie began to take stock of the apartment. A dingy picture of the bay of Naples hung over the fireplace, and four or five old coaching prints, yellow with age, and stained with smoke and dirt, decorated the walls. In the centre of the room was an infirm loo-table, upon which lay a newspaper and two or three dog's-eared volumes. On either side of the fireplace was an arm-chair, covered with torn and soiled Utrecht velvet, the original color of which it was very hard now to determine. Some half-dozen chairs of various patterns and in varying stages of decay were placed primly against the walls.

A bloated, dropsical sideboard, whose polish was considerably impaired by its dissipated life, and a huge sofa, originally, it may be presumed, part of the same suite as the arm-chairs, but looking, if possible, still more dirty and dilapidated, constituted the remainder of the furniture. Anything more depressingly dingy and mouldy than this apartment it was scarce possible to conceive. Yet this was known as "the saloon," in Coleman's, and the privilege of using it was rated at about the price you would pay for a good sitting-room at the Grosvenor or Langham.

By this time Charlie had discovered he was not alone. Stretched on the sofa was a plump, clean-shaved little man, who was regarding him out of a pair of quick, beady, black eyes, with no little curiosity.

"Servant, sir!" exclaimed the little man at last, bringing himself into a sitting position. "Our friend Coleman's is not exactly the sort of house to bid a gentleman welcome to; our friend Coleman being, between ourselves, about as filthy and extortionate a beast as ever I came across. Lord! to play the game of Tommy Dodd to perfection, you should have your fellow-creatures under lock and key. No competition. You sells 'em an imitation of what they want at your own price. If Coleman aint made his fortune, then Coleman gambles,—that's what's the matter."

Although Charlie was by no means in the best of spirits, he could not resist smiling at the little man's pettish outbreak against his janitor.

"Have you been here long?" he inquired courteously.

"About a week. I am here because I won't be put upon. Here have I been dealing with old Chowner, of Birmingham, for fancy goods, the last three years, and blest if he didn't refuse me a little time, though I told him I'd had a bad season. What do you think of that, young man?" inquired the stout little gentleman, sharply.

"Well," replied Charlie, who had a vague idea that a man who refuses time regarding the payment of a debt must be in the wrong, "it sounds hard,—yes, devilish hard!"

"Of course it was," continued the little man, excitedly; "it was disgraceful! 'If you don't pay I'll sell you up, sure as my name's Chowner,' says he. 'Only be selling your own property,' says I, 'and it won't fetch half as much as if I do it.' Well, we

both stuck to our words. I didn't pay, he sold me up, and here I am for the balance and costs."

Here their conversation was interrupted by the appearance of the proprietor of the den. Mr. Coleman was not a prepossessing gentleman in appearance by any manner of means. His physiognomy was unmistakably Jewish. His attire, like his furniture, was tawdry and somewhat stained. He was great in the matter of velvet collar and waistcoat, and wore a diamond ring or two on his dirty fingers; a very shiny hat, very much curled in the brim, gave a finish to his attire. Coleman's principle was very simple. As long as his lodgers had money, it was, of course, his interest to detain them at his house as long as possible. Their money gone, Coleman felt he could not be rid of them too quickly.

But he comes forward with an obsequious smile to confer with Detfield, and speedily arranges to let him what Mr. Coleman designates as "a bedroom fit for a lord, s'help me," and the use of the saloon for a sum that would have caused astonishment at a West End hotel.

"Now, then, capting, I dessay you'd like to send for your traps. We've a trustworthy messenger on the premises. Just a line, perhaps, to your solicitor, — it's the usual thing. Blesh you, you'll find yourself as right as ninepence to-morrow. Anything we can do for you, Mr. Turbottle, this evening?"

"Yes, Coleman, you can. I'll trouble you to select a considerable younger chicken for my dinner than I had last night. I should think you brought that bird with you when you first came here."

"Ah! I can't think, s'help me, how that happened. So particular as Mrs. Coleman is, too. You'll, of course, have a bit of dinner, capting. I'll go and see about it;" and so saying, Mr. Coleman bowed himself out of the room.

Detfield sat down and wrote a letter. It was not to a solicitor; he had accomplished his entanglements all unaided of that profession, and it did not occur to him that a lawyer might be useful in putting his liabilities at all events fairly before them. He sought advice from his old counsellor. He wrote to Fox Brine to advertise him that the crash had come at last, and asked him to come and see him.

Mr. Brine has his hands pretty full just now. He has established himself in Park Crescent, and constituted himself head-nurse at Montague Gore's bedside. Much too wise is Mr. Brine not to have other and more efficient help in that respect. He can depend on his own untiring vigilance, but is aware that, as a nurse, he is infinitely clumsy.

He has two skilled professionals, who relieve each other at intervals, and over these Mr. Brine exercises ceaseless supervision, gliding noiselessly into the room at all hours of the day and night; for, despite the fact that these two women have been sent with highest recommendations from a leading London hospital, Mr. Brine cannot divest himself of the idea that all nurses have a dash of Sairy Gamp in their composition, which it behoves him ever to be on the lookout for. However, as he kept this theory carefully locked in his own bosom, and always found the nurses alert

and watchful, no harm came of it; but those skilled, patient watchers would have been very angry had they suspected the distrust with which they were regarded.

Still does the fever-stricken man toss to and fro on his pillow, and pour forth incoherent babble, in which his wife, his business, and his boyish days are strangely mingled.

Eight days has he lain in this state, and the doctors look very grave now. It has come to this with their patient; if he gets no sleep within the next two or three days, the fever will wear him out. Continually do the nurses force stimulants beneath the white, unconscious lips, feeding the low-burning fires of life with such fuel as they can. But Montague Gore's weakness is now something pitiable to witness. Brine, perhaps, alone of the watchers round the sick man's couch is still sanguine of his recovery.

As Brine with anxious face comes out of his friend's chamber in company with the doctor, the butler puts a note into his hands, marked "Immediate," and which has been forwarded from the Temple. It was from Detfield.

"Unlucky, by Jove!" muttered Brine, as he read it. "As if I hadn't trouble enough in hand here. Well, I must go and see him; but what I can do for poor Charlie I haven't the faintest conception, beyond telling him to keep his pecker up."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BRINE AND TURBOTTLE MEET AGAIN.

Mr. Brine was a man of action. Intimating to the household that he should be back in a couple of hours, he sallied forth, hailed a passing hansom, and ordered the man to drive him to Cursitor street, best pace.

"All right, sir," replied the man, touching his hat, with a grin; "but you're the fust gemman ever gave me such orders. It's generally coming away gents are in such a confounded hurry."

"Go ahead, and don't talk," responded Mr. Brine, tersely.

The cabman accordingly did go ahead, relieving himself for having been snubbed by disregard for human life at the crossings most edifying to witness. However, thanks to their own activity, none of her majesty's lieges were crushed beneath the wheels of this modern Juggernaut, and in a very short time he pulled up at Coleman's evil-looking portal with a jerk. It was a sinister door that,—a low, beetle-browed doorway; a sneaking-looking doorway. It looked as if cognizant of criminal practices. Brine could not help thinking as he rang the bell that the place savored of "difficulties." He is ushered into the saloon by a shock-headed myrmidon, who, after glancing vaguely round, intimates that he will let Captain Detfield know he is here.

Only one gentleman present, and he, seated near the window, is apparently engaged

in the perusal of the day's paper. Mr. Brine casts a keen glance in his direction, starts, looks again earnestly, and then exclaims: —

"Mr. Turbottle, by the immortals!"

"Eh! no, what is it? no, it can't be!" exclaims the little man, starting to his feet. "Yes, it is, the noble gladiator."

"Just so," replied Brine; "and sorry to come across you in such disagreeable quarters."

"Oh, pooh! don't you mind me. I could go out to-morrow if I chose; I'm here on principle. I won't be put upon by old Chowner! no, nor any other man."

Brine looked inquiringly, and Mr. Turbottle proceeded to relate his grievances *in re* Chowner at length. In conclusion, it appeared that he derived immense gratification from the fact that Chowner had only recovered about half of his debt by the sale; that as the goods had been surrendered, he, Mr. Turbottle, was held acquitted of the whole, and was now simply undergoing incarceration on account of the costs, which he obstinately refused to pay.

"And now, Mr. Turbottle, to return to our conversation at Nottingham."

"Certainly, sir, certainly," replied the little man, with a merry twinkle in his eye. "I have often thought of your last remark: 'A remarkable pleasant liquor, Turbottle; yes, very much so, and calculated to promote pleasant dreams, and refreshing slumbers; taken temperately, Turbottle, taken temperately. But shun excess; excess terminates in fever, crime, and remorse. Beware of excess, Turbottle, I'm sorry to observe a tendency that way in you; a disposition to fill your glass twice to your companion's once. Curb such unholy appetites, Turbottle, and beware of excess.'"

"Confound you, stop your accursed reminiscences!" exclaimed Brine, laughing, when he was at length able to get a word in, for the little man had rattled out his speech with such volubility and gesticulation that for a few seconds Brine was positively speechless.

"That were your last observation, sure as I'm sitting here," replied Mr. Turbottle, demurely.

"Bah! I don't want to know what nonsense I talked after that confounded gin-punch got into my head. Will you tell me what you know about Mark Hemsworth, deceased?"

"I never said I knew anything about him," replied Mr. Turbottle, eying his interlocutor, steadily. "It's news to me that he is dead."

"Then you do know something of him?"

"Yes; I know now he's dead," returned the little man, with a provoking grin.

"You need not jest on the subject," said Brine, sharply. "There's property involved in this inquiry, and I consider you quite worth putting in the witness-box."

The jocularity died out of Mr. Turbottle's countenance, and it was somewhat sulkily he retorted: —

"This is a nice sort of way to turn round on a gemman you've spent a pleasant evening with. There's one comfort, when you've had me in the witness-box you'll

be satisfied there ain't much to be got out of me. With which somewhat equivocal remark Mr. Turbottle resumed his paper with much ostentation.

Brine hesitated as to what line he should take next. Quite evident that the threat of the witness-box had simply raised Mr. Turbottle's bristles; not probable that he would be induced to speak now.

"What a fool I was to lose my temper!" he muttered; "as if I was likely to get at what I wanted, except through patience and fair speaking."

"Well," he continued aloud, "I don't know what your motive may be for withholding the information you possess, but it's devilish hard no one will help poor Mrs. Hemsworth to come to her own."

Mr. Turbottle turned his head sharply at Brine's last words.

"What's that he said? Do you mean that Mark Hemsworth's widow is in trouble about getting her own?"

"Of course I do. Didn't I spend the whole night at Nottingham drumming it into your head? — only I suppose the punch muddled your ideas, and you couldn't take it in."

Mr. Turbottle's visage relaxed, he closed his right eye, laid his forefinger to the side of his nose, and gave vent to a short, sharp cachinnation.

But at this moment Detfield entered the room, and Brine, of course, turned to greet him.

"Well, Charlie," he said, "I'm awful sorry, old fellow, and when I've said that, I don't know what else to say."

"We never made much of my difficulties as often as we discussed them, Fox, did we?" replied Detfield, with a smile. "I don't think talking over them will be much use now. I sent for you, because I have a commission I want you to do for me in the first place, and one or two things I want you to consult you about besides. First, here is a queer note I got this morning from Claxby Jenkens. I went to have a talk with him after my row with Roxby, as I told you. He politely expressed his opinion that I was a fool; but in the end told me if ever he could do me a turn, *in re* Roxby, he would; adding, 'Mind, I don't play Roxby till I've a strong hand.' Read it:" —

"6 Charles street,

"August 10th.

"DEAR DETFIELD, — You'll, no doubt, think it very strange, but I *am* going to play Roxby — odder still, very much to your interests. I'm worth backing, as I told you I should be if ever this event came off. I hold a trump or two he has little idea of. The result concerns you so nearly, that you will know speedily whether I win or no. Meanwhile, adieu.

"Yours sincerely,

"CLAXBY JENKENS."

"Why, the scoundrel was down at Brompton-super-Mare not two days ago!" exclaimed Brine. "Charlie, I wouldn't pin much faith upon this man. A bigger villain

doesn't walk than Claxby Jenkens," and here Brine stopped abruptly, as he remembered that, though no doubt it was whispered abroad that Mrs. Gore had left her husband, yet, so far, no name had been coupled with hers as reason for her doing so.

She was held to have separated, not eloped, from her husband, save by Montague Gore himself, Brine, and the good people of Brompton-super-Mare; indebted these last for their belief to that scrofulous-minded old warrior, Colonel Prawn.

Brine had raised his voice as he finished his speech, his indignation against the major carrying him away for the moment. Now he was aware that not only Detfield was looking at him with some curiosity, but that Mr. Turbottle had suddenly wheeled his chair round, and was staring at him with the utmost amazement.

"Bah! Charlie," he continued, "I said more than I should have done. Only, I wouldn't put much faith in the major, if I was you; he's a bad lot."

"All the better fitted to tackle Roxby," replied the guardsman. "I can't fancy an honest fellow having much chance. It's odd,—I dare say foolish; but I can't help thinking the major will do me a good turn, though for the life of me I can't guess how. There, never mind; we'll say no more about it. The next thing, Fox, is, you must find me a lawyer."

"All right, and mind you make a clean breast of it with him. They can't keep you boxed up very long, you know. What would pull through, Charlie?"

"I don't know exactly,—between five and six thousand, I suppose."

"Well, you and your solicitor had better give your minds to ascertaining that sum exactly. Now, is there anything else? Because poor Montie Gore's down with brain fever, and I don't like to be long away from him. It's a case of touch and go."

"Yes, there is one thing more," replied Detfield, in rather a hesitating manner; "and busy as you are, Fox, you must spare me an hour for this. I want you to deliver this note with your own hands. Explain to Bessie that I am not in a dungeon, and that I shall be released in a few days; of course, I've said all that, but she'll be more reconciled if she hears it also from you who've seen me. Not a pleasant place to date one's love-letters from. Not a pleasant subject to have to write about to the girl one loves," added Charlie, bitterly.

"No," replied Brine, gently, "and it's not exactly a pleasant commission you've given me; but I'll do the best I can with it. Now, good-by," and the friends clasped hands. "Good-by, Mr. Turbottle."

"One moment, guv'nor, one moment. You said Mrs. Hemsworth was in trouble to come at her own,—that's gospel truth, eh?"

"Undoubtedly it is."

"And you said Claxby Jenkens was the biggest villain ever walked; that's a fact, too, aint it?"

"Most decidedly, to the best of my knowledge and belief."

"You mean it every bit; and you've something to go on, eh?"

"I mean it thoroughly, and have very good reasons for so doing."

"Very good. I suppose you'd come here again if you thought I'd anything to tell you?"

"Certainly."

"All right. I must think out things a bit. He knows where you live, I suppose?" said Mr. Turbottle, jerking his thumb in the direction of Detfield. "Curious I can't recollect your telling me all that at Nottingham, aint it?" and Mr. Turbottle winked knowingly. "Remarkably pleasant liquor is cold punch, — taken temperately, mind, taken temperately. Good-by, sir," and here Mr. Turbottle chuckled till he positively turned purple. Ere he recovered, Fox Brine was gone.

"Well," said that gentleman, as he whirled up Farringdon street in a hansom, "if I'm not collecting material for a play or novel just now, it can't be done by observation. Act I., The Sponging-house; Act II., The Boudoir; arrival of male confidant. The heroine ought to be dressed like Tilburina, in white satin. I hope she'll have her hair down; and of course she ought to faint. Rather she didn't, though; it's all very well on the stage, but in real life I never saw the man yet whom it didn't frighten. Roseneath House, — here we are." Mr. Brine jumped out, knocked, and sent in his card.

Of course his name was well-known to Bessie. She had heard Charlie speak of him often, and she gave instant directions to show him up. The girl divined at once that he brought her evil tidings.

Mr. Brine was a little taken aback as he entered the room. Very little indeed of Tilburina was there in the slight, dark-eyed girl, draped in simple muslin, her rich brown tresses braided in a simple knot, who, with pale cheeks and rather compressed lips, advanced to meet him with outstretched hand.

"You bring me bad news, I know, Mr. Brine; but Charlie is well?" and the brown eyes looked a little anxiously up at her visitor.

"Perfectly; I bring you a note from him. It was only that he thought you might like to put a question or two to a friend who has seen him in his captivity that caused me to be the bearer."

"It's very kind of you," replied Bessie, as she broke open her lover's note. "Pray sit down."

At this instant Miss Matilda entered the room, and of course Brine had to be presented.

"Well, sir," commenced that lady, "you, of course, bring evil tidings of Captain Detfield. We are quite prepared; ever since we adopted a scapegrace into the family we have expected disastrous news of him by every post and every visitor."

"Aunt!" exclaimed Bessie.

"Pooh! you chit! of course we have. Didn't he tell us that he expected what he delicately termed trouble every day of his eventful life? I suppose, Mr. Brine, it's come?"

Fox bowed.

"Well, I have no doubt you will think me a very foolish old woman, Mr. Brine; but, you see, I've somehow got fond of the child there, and I don't want the sunshine

to die out of her face; and then I don't know how it is, but I have got to like Charlie Detfield for himself. I suppose it's because he's the greatest ne'er-do-well I ever came across."

By this time Bessie had stole across to her aunt, slipped her hand into Miss Matilda's, and seated herself on a low chair close by that lady.

"I don't know," continued Miss Stanbury, slowly; "but I think there's good stuff in him. I think, if he were once clear of the follies of his youthful days, he would keep out of debt in future, and make Bessie a good husband. The long and short of which, Mr. Brine, is this, that I'm a very foolish old woman, and would help Captain Detfield out of his difficulties if I could. Now, if you can let me know how much is wanted, then I should be able to say if it were within my power to assist him."

"I don't know how to thank you for Charlie, Miss Stanbury," replied Brine, "It's a magnificent offer; but it cannot be, you know."

"And why not, sir?" retorted Miss Matilda, sharply.

"Because I don't quite think Charlie would allow you to pay his debts for him," said Brine, slowly.

"It has been the special prerogative of all aunts and uncles in every play I ever saw, — in every novel I ever read. If not his aunt yet, I am able to state, on the very best authority, that I am about to be;" and here Miss Bessie received a pinch that made her ear tingle.

"Well, we must think about it, Miss Stanbury," replied Brine, guardedly. "Whatever Charlie may decide, his gratitude to you must remain unbounded."

"I suppose he would have allowed his wife to pay his debts?" retorted Miss Stanbury, with some asperity. "I can't see much distinction."

Brine was conscious that he was involved in a very awkward argument, and only wished himself well out of it. He had dim memories of the schemes with which Charlie had first sought Roseneath House, and felt that he was taking higher ground than circumstances quite warranted.

"When he asked Miss Bessie to marry him, he didn't know she was an heiress," said Brine, at length.

"No, that was very like him; as if he would ever have married her if she wasn't," observed Miss Stanbury.

"Then he could not withdraw his words without the lady's consent, which he will never have," interposed Bessie, with a slight blush.

"And, therefore, you see it is all different," continued Brine, speaking very fast; "and, after all, it is Charlie has got to decide, not me. I'll find out what you want, Miss Stanbury; and in the mean time I've a lot to do, and must say good-by;" and, before Miss Matilda could collect herself for another attack, he had shaken hands, and left the house.

"Wheugh!" he muttered, when he got outside. "What a fool I was to give my opinion, as if it isn't all Charlie's business. There's plenty of men would find no fault with anybody who paid their debts, — let it be who it might."

CHAPTER XL.

NEMESIS.

Cissy, buried in the corner of a first-class carriage, is a victim to the saddest reflections as she hurries to town. She has forgotten, for the present, all her conceived wrongs. She remembers nothing now but that the man she loves lies wrestling with death; has lain, her father writes word, for days past, waging fell struggle for existence, — and she has not been by his pillow. She blames herself bitterly. He, ever so kind and thoughtful of her, yet the first time she in her womanhood is called upon to be a true wife to him, she was absent from his side.

"No, I was wrong to part in that way, to leave him without a word. My God! shall I ever hear him whisper my name again? To think that I may be too late; that the lips which had always soft words for me may be closed forever;" and Cissy's eyes filled. It was, indeed, only by a violent effort she refrained from a very tempest of tears.

Arrived in town, she drove straight to Park Crescent and rang. The tan in front of the house, the blinds but half drawn up, all spoke vividly of sickness within. Houses are wont to assume an aspect of woe when some one of their inmates lies stricken nigh to death. Houses have physiognomies, and a house that holds a flickering life within it is easy to recognize. Cissy shivered, warm summer day though it was, as she stood on the door-step awaiting an answer to her summons. She felt as if the dread shadow of the destroyer were already on her home.

But the door opened, and the butler appeared, only to be thrown into a state of imbecility and confusion by the apparition of his mistress that was painful to witness. To her quick, anxious inquiry after her husband, he faltered out the parrot-like rejoinder, "Master's pretty much the same, ma'am," which he had dispensed to all callers for the last four or five days.

But what did utterly puzzle him was where he was to show his mistress. He had a sort of undefined idea that his duty required him to say, "Not at home;" that somehow Mrs. Gore ought not to come there; but then, again, how was he to refuse admission to his mistress? Cissy relieved him of this dilemma by brushing rapidly past him, and ascending the stairs. The butler was recalled to himself by the exigency of the situation; he followed his mistress rapidly upstairs, and exclaimed, as they gained the landing: —

"Please step into the drawing-room, ma'am, while I send upstairs to say you are here. Master is allowed to see no one; and really it would be more prudent that the nurses, and so on, should be let know of your arrival."

There was reason in this.

"Yes, it would be best. Send quick; at once, you understand, Benson," replied Cissy, as she threw herself upon a fauteuil.

Now, it must be remembered that the domestics in Park Crescent were quite unaware of the blacker accusation that had been levelled against Cissy. They believed simply that a violent quarrel had taken place between their master and mistress, and that the latter, in her anger, had suddenly betaken herself to Brompton-super-Mare. In their own set in London, this was the accepted version of Mrs. Gore's abrupt disappearance from her home. True, there were the cynics, as there always will be, who held that when a woman ran away from her husband there was always another man at the bottom of it. But those who could give a personality to this man were very few, if we except the well-informed population of Brompton-super-Mare.

We know that both her husband and Brine, unfortunately for Cissy, are two of the firmest believers in her guilt. John Paynter shakes his head, as he talks the thing over with his wife, and says he hopes it may come out all right, "But there was a mysterious stranger, you know, Lizzie."

"And I don't care if there were fifty mysterious strangers," retorted Mrs. Paynter, impetuously, "and if Cissy was always meeting them. I tell you, John, she loved her husband very dearly, though she didn't quite know it. She's run away alone; take my word for it."

Mr. Brine, when he received the intelligence that Mrs. Gore was in the drawing-room, was as much taken a-back as his informant, the butler, had been previously. To him there was something revolting in the effrontery of this woman, who could come from the side of her paramour to sit by what would probably be her husband's death-bed. There lingered no doubt of Cissy's guilt in his mind; had he not been down to Brompton-super-Mare and seen for himself? She had fled from her husband's home. She was there with Claxby Jenkens. There could be but one inference drawn from that.

Mr. Brine by no means fancied the interview that laid before him; but he had made up his mind fully, and intended to swerve not one bit from his decision. Mrs. Gore must be made to understand that she had forfeited the shelter of her husband's roof; that her presence in that house was an insult past toleration; in short, that she must leave it, and at once. All this Brine had determined to explain to her thoroughly, —gently, if that would suffice; but in curt, forcible English should it be necessary; and to a woman who could act, as in his eyes Cissy had acted, Brine thought it very possible it would be to the latter method he should be called upon to resort.

"I suppose it will end in a scene," he muttered, as he slowly descended the stairs; "but stay in this house she shan't, I'm determined. What the deuce is her motive, I wonder? Some scheme concerning the proprieties, I suppose. I shouldn't be surprised if she's speculating upon how many hours poor Montie has still to live, —the Jezebel!"

He opened the drawing-room door. Mrs. Gore sprang quickly from her seat, as the handle turned, and advanced to meet the new-comer.

"Mr. Brine!" she exclaimed, in tones of visible disappointment, as she bent haughtily towards him. She had not forgotten the stiffness with which he had acknowledged her salutation at Brompton-super-Mare. "I suppose," she continued, after a few seconds' hesitation, "that I may now go to my husband."

"I regret to say, Mrs. Gore, that is quite impossible," replied Brine.

"Impossible! how so? Surely my presence can do Montague no harm, — how is he? is he still delirious? does he know people?"

"Poor Montie has recognized nobody for days."

"I have but this morning heard of his illness," continued Cissy, in a low, passionate whisper. "I hurried up from Brompton-super-Mare immediately. Surely, Mr. Brine, the doctors can have no valid reason for refusing his wife her privilege of nursing him. Do not be afraid that I shall break down, or do anything foolish; believe me, I have plenty of command over myself. I blame myself severely that I should have been away when it happened;" and as she finished, Cissy brushed the tears from the wet lashes, and looked almost pleadingly up into his face.

"A consummate actress, this woman," thought Brine.

"Mrs. Gore," he replied, "pray don't oblige me to speak more plainly; but surely you must see that your remaining in this house, after what has taken place, is an impossibility."

"Ah! you have heard that Montague and I have quarrelled. I might have guessed as much from your manner. But is a quarrel, that might have been already healed had Montague not been struck down, to debar me from my right to tend him now he is sick?"

"Such quarrel as there is between you two undoubtedly does," replied Brine, bitterly.

"I deny it. You have always disliked me. I could see it the first evening we ever met, though ignorant of the cause of my offending. And now," continued Cissy, haughtily, "I challenge your right to come between us. By what authority, sir, do you take it upon yourself to interpose between husband and wife?" As she concluded, Cissy drew herself up, and her gray eyes flashed defiance at her adversary.

"I interpose as Montague Gore's most intimate friend, — as one to whom he confided the shameful story of his wife's desertion; as one who has since verified the story for himself. I act for Montague as he would for himself, could he understand your presence in this house. Don't question my authority," added Brine, sternly.

"I do, and more than ever now," returned Cissy. "Montague tell you why I left him! I'll not believe it. Shameful!" she exclaimed, scornfully; "his conscience told him why; but, ah!" she continued, dropping her voice, "this is no time to blame him; but believe me, Mr. Brine, what shame there might be, rests not with me."

Fox Brine stood for a moment almost stupefied by what he conceived this woman's extraordinary audacity; then he replied, in almost menacing tones: —

"Once for all, will you take my advice, and leave this house quietly? I am loath, very, to speak to you plainly."

"Speak, sir!" replied Cissy, as she reared her head, proudly. "I should like to hear upon what grounds you conceive yourself entitled to forbid me my own house. I can imagine your having been at some pains to rake up stories to my disadvantage."

The contemptuous tones, the final taunt, were not calculated to make her adversary stay his hand. Brine, moreover, looked upon this woman as utterly false; still there was more of sadness than bitterness in his voice, as he replied, quietly: —

"You would hear the charges against you summed up? You would know what version your husband and his friends have of your sudden flight?"

Cissy winced a little even at this word.

"For weeks past, then, it has been known to your husband and his intimates, that you were in the habit of giving clandestine rendezvous to a stranger. I, myself, upon one occasion, saw you part with this man in Montague square, and allow him to kiss you in so doing."

Cissy could not repress a movement of surprise.

"Your husband expostulates; a few days after, you leave your home, and, when next heard of, you are established at Brompton-super-Mare, with this identical stranger as your companion. The stranger is identified as Major Claxby Jenkens, — a man more known than respected about town. There is but one conclusion the world can draw from this story, and if you could have heard the current gossip at Brompton-super-Mare you would have found that there, at all events, they had drawn that deduction."

Cissy had thrown herself on a sofa, and, with face buried in her hands, lay literally cowering under the foul charge on which she stood arraigned. As if a veil had been torn from before her eyes, she suddenly recognized how her conduct could be judged by her acquaintance; could be, forsooth? — had been. She saw how plausible the whole story was. She could understand how Brine had been led to believe in it. But, Montague, ah! Montague should have known her better; he ought not to have judged her so hastily.

Then it flashed across her how she had judged him; had she not deemed him false upon even more slender evidence? She had convicted him upon a kiss, while she, herself, had been found guilty upon a train of circumstantial evidence of which a kiss was but a link. It occurred to her that she had wronged Montague, verily, as she herself was foully wronged at that moment.

Brine remained silent. A few minutes, and Cissy raised herself, pushed back the dark masses of hair from her temples, and looked gravely at him. There was no defiance now in her attitude; her face was very still, though her lips trembled slightly as she spoke.

"Mr. Brine," she said, gently, "I have heard this terrible charge for the first time. You have seen me overwhelmed by it. A woman may well be that, although innocent; and I tell you I am innocent. I tell you I can disprove the whole story in the course of a day or two. But so cleverly have appearances combined against me I can hardly blame you for holding me guilty, as I see you do. It is useless for me to

say more at present. Major Jenkens shall explain what the relations between us really are, and, believe me, this hideous accusation will then tumble to pieces like a house of cards."

Brine was struck by the change in her manner. The first shock at hearing the charge made against her overcome, and she met it in quiet, resolute, steadfast fashion; not defiantly, nor yet lightly; but as a woman might, who, thoroughly impressed with the gravity of her situation, yet felt no manner of doubt about clearing herself in the eyes of all men, and that right speedily.

She was silent for a little; then once more she looked beseechingly at him, and her voice shook a little as she spoke.

"You are prejudiced against me, Mr. Brine; but when I pledge you my word that this calumny not only can be, but will be almost immediately, refuted, do you still dare to refuse me my place by my husband's sick-bed?"

Brine was staggered. He had entered that room with no doubt of this woman's guilt. He had entertained no doubt of it, when he summed up so tersely the evidence against her. He had deemed her acting a part all through the first portion of their interview; but Cissy's last words had the ring of truth in them; and her quiet, earnest, self-sustained manner assuredly carried no consciousness of guilt about it.

"Mrs. Gore," he replied, at length, "I don't think I'm prejudiced against you, but I will own, fairly, that I have judged you as the world has judged you till the last few minutes. No man, I think, could have heard you assert your innocence of that of which you are accused, without at least pausing to reflect whether he may not have been mistaken."

"Thank you, Mr. Brine," replied Cissy, with a grateful smile; "then admit my right to go to my husband."

She was thinking more even now of regaining the privilege of watching and tending the sick-bed of the man she loved than of re-establishing her fair fame.

"I am afraid that cannot be," replied Brine, uneasily.

"Why not?" asked Cissy, eagerly. "You said you held me innocent."

"I didn't quite say that. I said I thought I had been mistaken. I say now, I devoutly trust that before forty-eight hours Mrs. Gore will have triumphantly refuted all the scandal at present associated with her name. Nobody will be more delighted than myself; nobody will more humbly apologize for having for a little doubted her."

"I still do not see why I may not go to my husband," cried Cissy, imploringly. "It is no guilty woman who asks you. Do you think, if I were, I could dare set foot in his house? It is a wife who asks to tend the husband she loves with her whole heart, in his hour of need. I must, I will go. It's God's truth, I've done nothing to forfeit the rights my marriage vow gave me!" and, starting to her feet, Cissy would have left the room, had not Brine interposed.

"Impossible! For your sake as much as his," he cried.

"My sake?" exclaimed Cissy.

"Yes; can you not see it? Surely, you don't want to force the brutal explanation from my lips?"

"I don't understand you," said Cissy, her gray eyes open wide with astonishment.

"Cannot you fancy what the world will say, if you stay here before your innocence is established?"

"No. What scandal can come of my nursing my husband?"

Brine's face flushed, and his voice came thick with shame, as he said:—

"Don't blame me. The world will probably say that you took advantage of your husband's prostration to obtain pardon of your sin."

Cissy started, and literally trembled from head to foot.

"I thank you, sir," she said, after a slight pause. "I had needed to have been, indeed, the guilty woman you think me to have dreamed that it was possible to take that view of my return. You handle the knife ruthlessly, Mr. Brine; you lay open wounds and spare not. I understand now,—I am not fit to be beneath my husband's roof while this foul stain rests upon me. A few hours, and you yourself shall apologize for the wrong you have done me. Poor Montague! I don't think he would have judged his foolish wife so hardly. I think he would have taken my word for my innocence without waiting for the proofs. He did love me."

"If I have spoken harshly, Mrs. Gore, forgive me. If you are an innocent woman, believe me, it is all for the best."

"I will try to think so. One thing you cannot refuse me,—you will send me word of any change to the Langham Hotel. And, Mr. Brine," continued Cissy, as her voice dropped to a whisper, "remember, should it be—should it be for the worse, guilty or not guilty, I must bid him good-by. You cannot stand between us at such a moment."

"No. You shall be sent for," replied Brine.

"You promise."

"I swear it."

"Good-by," and, with a slight inclination of her head, Cissy took her departure.

CHAPTER XLI.

ANALYZING A KISS.

Cissy, on leaving her husband's house, drove straightway to the Langham Hotel, engaged a room, and telegraphed to her maid to join her there next day. She had chosen this hotel because it was but little distance from Park Crescent. Moreover, there were porters up all night, and, in the event of that terrible summons arriving for her, she thought she could count upon being speedily aroused, should it come to her in the night-time.

Very, very sad was Cissy. It was terrible to think that Montague could have believed all this of her; frightful to think that he might die and never hear her explanation. Saddest of all was it that she should be deemed to have forfeited her right to watch over him in his illness. Then she thought once more over the scene she had witnessed in his chambers between him and Lizzie Paynter. If it was possible her own conduct could have been so misconstrued, might she not also have built up her theory regarding her husband's relations with Mrs. Paynter upon equally unsubstantial grounds?"

What was it she had seen? An earnest conversation between them, at the termination of which Montague had kissed her. She had been unable to hear what they said. She had imagined a love-scene between them, but was forced to confess it was founded entirely upon that one kiss. Yet, even in her penitence and humility, Cissy felt that it was a kiss she had a right to demand explanation of. She would. From her husband it was impossible; but she would have the whole affair out with Lizzie Paynter to-morrow.

A somewhat hazardous experiment this. Difficult to say how Mrs. Paynter would take such an attack. For Lizzie was a woman cunning of fence, and the opportunity of carrying the war into the enemy's country, should she wax angry, was only too obvious.

In the mean time Mrs. Gore despatched a messenger with a note to Charles street, begging her father to call upon her the first thing the next morning. When the messenger returned, he brought back word the major had gone out of town for a day or two.

The Fates apparently were against Cissy. To clear her fair fame it was essential that the major should bear testimony. He not only could state, but prove, that she was his daughter. However strong his reasons for keeping in the background, Cissy had little fear but that he would come forward when he heard of what she was accused.

It was in her eyes of vital importance that she should clear herself at once. Not so much on account of the scandal, — Cissy's lip curled contemptuously as she thought how surely she could demolish that piece of malicious gossip, — but till she could do so, she was still banished from the place she now most coveted on earth, — the side of her husband's couch.

Who has not at some time known that terrible torture of waiting, with idle hands, for the hourly bulletin of the health of some one very dear to us; when you can do nothing; when medical skill confesses the issue to be in the hands of the Creator; when there remains nothing we can do to alleviate, nothing we can do to assist the sufferer in his grim wrestle with death; when you sit with folded arms awaiting the result of the struggle in which all power to help is denied you?

Even then, where one loves deeply, it is something to be able to smooth the pillow, to bathe the patient's brow, to moisten the parched lips. To those that sit patiently within call of the sick-room, and simply *await*, the pain is infinitely more than to those

who are performing such simple and perhaps useless offices. To stand motionless, a mere spectator of the fight, is always a lot hard to bear. Cissy is doomed to stand quite aloof, and wait for tidings, — she whose loving hands should have performed those tasks now left to professional nurses.

She had lain down dressed on her bed, so as to be ready at a moment's notice. In her state of anxiety sleep was an impossibility. She descended from her room as soon as the hotel recognized that the day had begun. A cup of strong coffee braced her nerves a little, but the waiting soon became past bearing.

A messenger from Brine informed her that there was as yet no change in her husband; that the doctors looked more anxious than ever, and said he must sleep soon, or sleep the sleep that knows no waking. The waiting became unendurable; the tension on the nerves could be borne no longer. She must do something; action of some kind was imperative; she would carry out her last night's idea. She would go and see Lizzie Paynter.

Ordering a brougham to be ready at a moment's notice, she gave the clerk special directions to send it after her with any messenger that should arrive, and then, getting into a hansom, drove rapidly off to Mrs. Paynter's.

Lizzie's astonishment knew no bounds when her visitor was announced, but she sprang up to receive her with genuine pleasure.

"I knew I was right," thought Lizzie; "if the whole story had not been a dreadful calumny, she wouldn't have come to see me."

"My dear Cissy!" she exclaimed, seizing her visitor by both hands, "I am charmed to see you. You so persistently refused to have anything to say or to do with me before you ran, — I mean left town, that I could only infer I had offended you in some way."

"It may be you had," replied Cissy, quietly releasing herself; "we will come to that presently. I want to have a talk with you."

"With pleasure. One moment, while I tell them I am not at home;" and Lizzie rang and gave the answering footman the necessary instructions. "There, now I am at your disposal until luncheon, for which the court must adjourn, you know, and then I'm ready to gossip again till dinner-time."

"I'm in slight humor for gossip," replied Cissy. "Do you know that my husband is dying; that I am told it is almost hoping against hope to think otherwise?"

Lizzie bowed her head in assent.

"And do you know what the world has thought fit to charge me with?" continued Cissy, in the same hard, mechanical tones she had used throughout.

"Yes, I have heard it; and, as John will tell you, have pronounced it a foul lie from the beginning, — a charge that you could speedily clear yourself of when it came to your ears; and I am right, Cissy, am I not?" exclaimed Mrs. Paynter, vehemently.

"Yes, thank you for your belief in me. It is something to have had one friend who held me not utterly worthless."

"My darling!" cried Mrs. Paynter, impulsively, "that there was something wrong

between you and Montie, I knew; but that what was said of you was false I could swear."

A jealous twinge ran through Cissy at hearing her husband so familiarly alluded to, but she gulped it down determinedly, and in the same calm, steady voice said:—

"Did you ever guess what was wrong between Montague and me?"

"I think so," replied Mrs. Paynter, softly.

"What?"

"This is not quite a fair question, Cissy. I may be mistaken, you know, and my surmise might only make you angry. I can see quite clearly that you have something against me as it is, and mark me, I want to know what?"

For a moment Mrs. Gore eyed her hostess keenly, and then said slowly:—

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite," replied Mrs. Paynter, nestling still further into the embraces of the luxuriant arm-chair in which she was seated.

"Then, before we come to that, you must tell me what you think Montague and I quarrelled about. Afterwards, as you happen to be mixed up in it, I will tell you why I left him."

"Me!—I have anything to do with your running off to Brompton-super-Mare?" exclaimed Lizzie, with unfeigned surprise.

"You will see; answer my question."

"I thought this, although you didn't quite know it, my dear," replied Mrs. Paynter, not without a *soupçon* of malice in her voice,—"you had just fallen madly in love with your husband. He expostulated with you about some queer acquaintance you had,—a relic, I suppose, of your old Paris days,—and in your anger at finding your love so little understood and believed in, you took high dudgeon, and went off with your maid."

Cissy blushed crimson at finding that her secret had been so cleverly read; that this great love of hers had been patent to her friend, even before she was aware of it herself.

"You're right in part; but only in part. That I love my husband passionately, I am proud to avow. I left him, as I thought, upon much stronger grounds than those."

Lizzie's open blue eyes and eager face expressed how interested she felt in the coming revelation.

"Do you remember going to see my husband at his chambers?" asked Mrs. Gore.

Lizzie could not repress a slight start. She had deemed that a circumstance utterly unknown to her visitor.

"You do, I see; and you probably remember *all* that took place there," continued Cissy.

"Ah! you saw that interview, then," replied Mrs. Paynter, nestling once more into the depths of her chair, with apparently intense enjoyment. She felt quite easy now she knew where the attack was to be made, she knew how facile it was to explain it all; but she had hardly been woman if she had not determined that Cissy should be exercised a little upon what she considered must have been unfairly acquired knowledge.

"I saw the finish of it, at all events," returned Mrs. Gore, with some asperity.

"Where were you?" inquired Lizzie, with a *naïveté* almost ludicrous.

"That matters little. I wish you to explain why you went there."

"To see Montie Gore," replied Mrs. Paynter, maliciously. "But where were you? Did he know you were there?"

"Will you tell me why you were there?" asked Cissy again, with a decided tremor in her voice.

"In your interest, my dear; and I fancy I served you pretty well, although it has all come about in a very different manner from that I intended."

"Do you understand that I saw *all* that took place between you and my husband?" exclaimed Cissy, passionately.

Mrs. Paynter gave a quick little nod of assent, and then became, to all intents, lost in admiration of the lace of her pocket-handkerchief.

"You understand this," continued Cissy, in quick, vehement tones; "and you think I am fool enough to believe that you were studying my interests in stealing my husband's love from me!"

"I what?" interrupted Mrs. Paynter, with great elevation of her eyebrows.

"Did your best to steal my husband's love from me," reiterated Cissy, hotly; "how far you have been successful I dare hardly think. I know I have been a fool; that I have been induced to withhold from him a confidence I should not; that I have tried his love hardly. Surely he did love me once. Was it for you, who I believed my friend, to take advantage of our misunderstanding,—to snatch at what I in my madness had treated with disdain? God help me! Lizzie, but I had deemed you true to me, at all events." A slight sob shook Cissy's voice as she finished; and even the arch-coquette opposite her felt a little uncomfortable as she witnessed her visitor's unmistakable emotion; but Lizzie was determined to play her game out for more reasons than one.

"An ugly vice that jealousy," thought Mrs. Paynter; "a sharp lesson will benefit you, my dear;" and then the vivacious lady, who, good-natured though she was, had a slight dash of the cat in her disposition, could not forbear the pleasure of teasing her friend just a little longer.

"I really don't know what you mean," replied Mrs. Paynter, at length.

"Don't equivocate," returned Mrs. Gore, fiercely. "I saw Montague kiss you with my own eyes."

"Ah! it was very lucky you did, you know."

"What!" cried Cissy, starting to her feet.

"Very lucky," returned Mrs. Paynter, demurely. "You would never have found out you loved your husband if you hadn't. There, sit down, do, and I will tell you all about it. I'm tired of teasing you, you foolish child!"

Cissy dropped once more into her chair, and stared through her wet lashes in mute astonishment at her tormentor.

Mrs. Paynter had not quite meant to let her off so cheaply; but Cissy was so evidently in such sore distress that her better nature overcame her love of fun.

"You saw Montague kiss me," she said, after a short pause; "well, I'll own to to you, in the first place, I do not think he could have well helped it. It is possible, my dear, to put a man in such a situation that, unless he's an utter barbarian, he can do no less. Montague, not being an irreclaimable savage, bowed to circumstances. Do you understand that?"

"No," returned Cissy, shortly.

"Did you see how it came about?"

"I fancy so."

"I don't think you did quite. Well, as I said before, it was my caprice of the minute to make your husband kiss me. Without being very *gauche* he could hardly have done otherwise. What did it mean? About as much as if he had shaken hands with me. No colder kiss was ever laid on woman's cheek. I had brought him what he deemed very good news. I had poured balm into a bleeding wound, *ma mie*, that you refused to bind up. It was my whim, never mind why, to have a kiss for my fee. You needn't look anxious, I've no wish to repeat the experiment. Being kissed by a statue is all I can compare it to; and if you think we are the least bit in love with each other, you mistake. Come, I'll confess I'd just a tiny bit of pique to gratify."

"But still, what led you to go down to his chambers?"

"Because I wanted to see him," replied Mrs. Paynter, with a little grimace.

"But why didn't you call in Park Crescent?" persisted Cissy.

"Because, you noodle, I wanted to see him alone; because I wanted to explain to him that he was laboring under an egregious misconception."

"What was that?"

Mrs. Paynter's blue eyes sparkled mischievously.

"I wanted to tell him something that you wouldn't; something that he was fretting his heart to know. Can you guess what it was, Cissy?"

Cissy's face flushed rosy-red. She answered nothing, but looked mutely at her friend.

"Well, what I did tell him was this: That his wife loved him very dearly, and that he was making a very great mistake in supposing she didn't; and that I was getting quite wretched at seeing two people, whom I knew to be really attached to each other, drifting apart from some miserable misunderstanding that I was unable to fathom. I know," continued Mrs. Paynter, with mock humility, "that I did very wrong; one should never interfere between husband and wife. John told me so, and John's always right. Can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you!" cried Cissy, springing from her seat, crossing and throwing her arms round her friend. "Can you forgive me, Lizzie, for having so cruelly doubted you? If I had never come to Montague's chambers that morning, I should have saved both myself and him much misery; looking back, I understand it all now. I comprehend all his efforts to come to an understanding with me; how patient he was under my coldness and insolence; I, at the time, thinking I was doubly betrayed;

wronged by my friend, wronged by my husband! the dupe, the mere cat's-paw of you both. Fool that I was! And yet, Lizzie, I had some slight excuse, — that scene had made most wives jealous."

"Yes," replied Lizzie, "but who was to guess you were looking on?"

"If I looked, I suffered," replied Cissy, simply.

"I'm afraid you did; and was that the reason you took yourself off to Brompton-super-Mare?"

Cissy nodded.

"Ah, well! I think I'll never plot again. It's all very well for the dramatists, who can settle their last act beforehand; but in real life our dramas don't quite come off as we intend them. But, Cissy, are you sure you have quite got over it?"

"Got over what?"

"The — the — you know."

"I don't."

"Well, that kiss," said Mrs. Paynter, her eyes dancing with fun. "It was a very wee one, you know, because you saw it."

"Yes, I forgive Montague, because I believe such temptation to be beyond man's strength," replied Cissy, smiling, "when you play temptress."

"That's not forgiving me," laughed Lizzie.

"No; but I can afford to forgive you in one sense. You did deserve it for what you tried to bring about."

"And why not pardon me altogether?" asked Mrs. Paynter, curiously.

"You couldn't expect me to."

"But why?"

A gleam of the old humor flashed over Cissy's face as, putting her lips down to Mrs. Paynter's ear, she whispered: —

"You can't expect me to forgive you for not appreciating what you got, you know. I consider them valuable."

"It's all very well," laughed Mrs. Paynter. "I'm afraid these men are all alike, and, after the manner of dishonest tradesmen, keep *them* of two qualities."

"I must go, Lizzie. You have taken a load off my heart; but I am in sad trouble still."

"Of course, you must be," replied Mrs. Paynter, suddenly sobered, as she thought of poor Montague battling for life. "Hope for the best, Cissy. I know, poor fellow, he hangs between life and death; still, though I don't know why, I have a presentiment he will pull through, and that there are many happy years in store for you."

"That he should die and never know the truth about me is what seems to me so terrible," replied Cissy, tearfully.

"You mustn't think of that. I'm anxious almost as you can be, and send every morning to inquire. Good-by, my darling," and, with a warm embrace, the two reconciled friends separated.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE MAJOR DOES HIS DUTY BY ROXBY.

MAJOR JENKENS, as we have heard, was out of town. Unfortunately, too, for Cissy, on his return next morning, he drove straight to his office in John street instead of to his chambers in Charles street, Berkeley square. The major had been down to confer with one of his principal employers, to receive final instructions on a rather delicate piece of business, which that worthy had thought fit to confide to him.

Of all his employers, of all the men he had ever been engaged in business or nefarious transactions with, this man Simmonds was the only one for whom the major had conceived a positive awe. Of him he had almost a superstitious dread. He had witnessed so much of Mr. Simmonds' malevolence, been so astonished at his multiplicity of resource, at the boundless information he appeared to procure, that the major had registered a solemn vow always to be perfectly straightforward in all dealings between them. He was the one man Claxby Jenkens owned he dared not quarrel with; the one man he never attempted to get the best of.

Roxby, he admitted, was clever, very clever, — not easy by any means to get the weather-gauge of Roxby. That eminent financier had proved too many for him more than once; but still, give him a sufficiently strong hand, and the major was ready to fight his battle over again with Roxby at any time.

With Simmonds it was different. He felt that the truculent money-lender was too much for him, too cunning of fence for him to venture to cross swords with. Claxby Jenkens was too astute a man to overrate his own capabilities, and he acknowledged that Simmonds was beyond him.

Mr. Simmonds, it may be remembered, was the principal holder of that luckless insolvent Detfield's bills. If there was one point on which Mr. Simmonds was perfectly inflexible it was the having his own again, with all the profits accruing from the lending of money upon doubtful security. In Captain Detfield's case, that, at present, looked far from hopeful; at all events, for a considerable period.

Mr. Simmonds, turning the matter over in his own mind, arrived at the conclusion that it was possible to procure a settlement of this most unpromising account very speedily. Pressure, no doubt, would have to be applied, and it was manifest that it was useless to exercise it further on the guardsman himself.

"Necessary," argued Mr. Simmonds, "to squeeze somebody in his behalf, and, as luck will have it, I fancy I can give a turn of the screw to some one who has it within his power to put things straight for the captain. We will see."

He had one or two conferences with the major on this point, and finally he asked him down to dine and sleep, at a small villa he owned at Medenham, to talk it over

for the last time. Do not think that the usurer had any admiration for the silver Thames, and the lovely scenery of its banks, — he was dead to all such feelings as an oyster. He had got the cottage in part payment of a bad debt, and thought, having failed to let it, that he might as well live in it for the summer months.

The major had returned to town, highly jubilant. He was instructed to have another little game with his friend Roxby, and Mr. Simmonds had furnished him with a trump or two, that he flattered himself would considerably astonish that gentleman.

Having deposited his travelling-bag, and looked through his letters in John street, the major jumped into a cab, and drove off to Fenchurch street. He sent up his card, and the busy financier received it with more attention than he had done Detfield's. He had little time to wait before a clerk intimated that Mr. Roxby would see him.

"Good-morning, Jenkens; sit down and let's know what it is you've come about," said Roxby, cheerfully, as he extended his hand. "No need to tell you that time is always precious in these parts."

"I know," replied the major, tersely, as he seated himself. "You must spare me a few minutes, though, all the same. I've come down on Simmonds' behalf. You know he holds some stiffish bills of Captain Detfield's?"

"Of course I do," replied Roxby, as an evil expression came over his countenance. "It was I recommended him to stand no more nonsense about them, but to have his money, or push things to extremities."

"But," said the major, diffidently, "you surely didn't imagine that Detfield could pay?"

"I knew, sir, that if he hadn't been a puritanical, insolent young prig, he could have paid, and that he deserved to feel that he was not quite his own master," returned Roxby, savagely.

"Still you were quite aware that Simmonds' chance of getting his money was not improved by such proceedings," observed the major, blandly, as he adjusted his spectacles.

"That's as may be; but you see, my dear Jenkens, whether Simmonds gets his money or not is a matter that don't very much concern me."

"Hum! I don't know. Simmonds is a little sore about your advice; says you misled him, to gratify some private pique of your own. Dangerous man to quarrel with, don't you think?"

"I'll tell you what I think," replied Roxby, suavely, — "that our mutual friend Simmonds never took advice from any one that his own judgment didn't indorse. If he followed my hint, it was because he thought it seemed to offer the best chance of recouping himself."

"Well, he has got another idea in his head now. He has heard all about Detfield's engagement to your ward; of course he sees if that marriage comes off, he would be tolerably certain to get his money at once."

"Ah, you had better tell him not to speculate on improbabilities," rejoined Roxby, with an ironical smile.

"That's just where it is, — he insists that, if you would only give your consent, it might take place in a few weeks."

"Then you had better inform him, my dear Jenkens, that I never give anything away for nothing, except my blessing," replied Roxby, in the most unctuous tones; "and tell him, moreover, that if I had not depended upon a blundering confederate to pick a suitable partner for her, my charming ward would have been married some weeks back."

"I did my best," said the major, deprecatingly.

"Dear me," replied Roxby, rubbing his hands, softly, "to think of a man of the world like you being so deceived! Of course, it is impossible for any guardian to give his consent to a wealthy ward's marriage with a broken-down spendthrift. I cannot countenance anything so preposterous; no, not even to oblige my dear friend Simmonds."

"You won't think me taking a liberty," said the major, with an accession of nervousness and humility that should have put his imperious companion on his guard, "if I point out something to you."

"Oh, dear, no," replied Roxby, with a benignant smile, "unless you are about to indicate another wooer for Miss Stanbury. You can't expect me to believe in your selections, after the precious mess you've made of things so far;" and, in spite of his smile, there was a vindictive gleam in the financier's eyes as he concluded.

"No; I was about to point out that you can hardly hope to make money of the disposal of your ward's hand in future."

"Who told you, sir, that I ever contemplated such a rascally arrangement?" returned Roxby, loftily.

The major deliberately adjusted his spectacles, and stared at his companion. It was a bit of *hardiesse*, of impudent effrontery after his own heart. He saw that the financier deemed it possible he did not know the exact truth.

"Who told me?" he said, gently, — "Captain Detfield. What was the price? Five thousand. What was his answer? Tolerably personal, contemptuous, and in the negative. How do things stand at present? I know no more than this. It is very unlikely you will be able to induce Miss Stanbury to accept any one else for a husband before she is twenty-one. Conclusion, your ward's hand is no longer salable."

"Ha! that is the way our bankrupt young friend accounts for his repulse, is it? A venomous young scorpion, who would blacken respectable people's characters, eh? And you think this an additional reason why I should oblige Simmonds? Jenkens, my worthy friend, you grow old, to put it mildly. You showed unmistakable signs of approaching your dotage when you selected Captain Detfield as a fit husband for my ward."

"Did I?" returned the major, quietly; though there was a contraction of the muscles about his mouth that augured he was not insensible to Roxby's taunts. "I venture to remark your instructions were not sufficiently explicit."

"Clear enough to any one with average comprehension," replied Roxby, contemptuously.

"No, when you wanted a thorough blackguard, why couldn't you say so? they're by no means scarce."

"Enough of this," cried Roxby, in a voice thick with passion. "Whatever I wanted, I did not want a nincompoop as confederate. Further discussion is useless. I have lots to do."

"I must trespass a few minutes more on your time, nevertheless; we have a little wandered from the point. Simmonds, anxious to recover his money, wishes you to give your consent to this marriage."

"And as I don't care a rush whether Simmonds recovers his money or not, I shall do nothing of the kind. There is no more to be said," and Mr. Roxby threw himself back in his chair with the air of a man wearied by a fruitless discussion.

"A dangerous man to offend, Simmonds," observed the major, dryly.

"No doubt, if your head is under his belt, as Detfield's happens to be; but you see I chance to be quite as big, I might say a bigger man than Simmonds in the city. An ill-disposed money-lender is a bugbear I can afford to laugh at. He neither holds nor is likely to hold bills of mine. Now, I really have a lot of business to get through."

"Then I may tell him that is your fixed determination," said the major, rising.

"Most certainly."

"It's an odd coincidence after what you've said," observed the major, carefully flicking some dust from his hat with his pocket-handkerchief; "but Simmonds happened to mention he held a bill of yours for two thousand."

"He hold a bill of mine!" ejaculated Roxby, with evident astonishment.

"Yes; accepted by old Muddlehurst. However, you needn't trouble your head about it; Simmonds is not uneasy. He knows your name's good enough, to say nothing of having Muddlehurst's at the back. He's not afraid but what it will be met when due. It was only then it struck me as odd when you said he would never hold a bill of yours. Good-by."

"Stop a moment. How did that bill come into Simmonds' hands?" and an acute observer might have detected a slight shade of anxiety in Roxby's tone. "Graves and Downham, who always discount my paper as they do hundreds of others, are celebrated for being close men, who hold it themselves till due. They owe half their business to that one thing. Men engaged in as many financial schemes as I am don't like their bills hawked about the market. We pay a shade more to Graves and Downham for that very reason."

"Of course, I know all that; but it seems they have just taken in a new partner. He, seeing the firm rather pressed, thought there could be no harm in circulating a few of the best bills they had in hand. A mistake, of course."

"It's an infamous breach of faith," exclaimed Roxby, angrily.

"Well, it is rather; but it can't matter to you, of course," and as he spoke he

eyed his companion keenly from beneath his spectacles. The major rejoiced in the conviction that he was about to do his duty towards his neighbor in a somewhat satisfactory fashion.

"No; though that doesn't make it any the less a scandalous piece of work on the part of Graves and Downham," retorted Roxby, with evident uneasiness.

"Well, good-by," said the major, as he turned towards the door; "I mustn't take up any more of your time. I shouldn't like to quarrel with Simmonds myself, especially when you've nothing to get by it. He's a dangerous enemy; but, of course, you know your own affairs best."

"Good-by," replied Roxby, shortly.

But the major was not gone yet; he paused with his hand on the door, and then, as if it had just occurred to him, exclaimed: —

"By the way, Muddlehurst's been very ill lately, hasn't he?"

"Not that I'm aware. What makes you ask?"

"Oh, nothing. Simmonds thought his signature looked wonderfully shaky, that's all."

Roxby's florid face blanched, his lips trembled, and his hands toyed nervously with the pen they had taken up. The two men had changed parts; it was Roxby now who was the irresolute, hesitating man. As for the major, his face was set hard, his lips were compressed, and his dark eyes gleamed beneath his spectacles with that cruel, savage light you may see in a cat's eyes before she springs.

"What the deuce do you mean?" stammered Roxby, at last.

"What do I mean?" he said, in a deep, low voice, as he walked swiftly from the door, placed his hands upon the desk, and leaned over the cowering coward seated behind it. "I mean this, — that Simmonds doesn't believe Muddlehurst ever signed his name to that bill; is so doubtful of the fact, indeed, that he means to ask him the question to-morrow."

"Spare me! Tell him I can and will meet it, so help me God. It will ruin me if he makes inquiries;" and the wretched forger dropped his head upon his hands and literally grovelled before his antagonist.

The major contemplated him for a moment with cynical contempt. He despised utterly a man who could not face the consequences of his misdeeds with perfect coolness. The major reckoned courage, or, as he would have termed it, "pluck," one of the highest of human attributes. If, like the wolf, you live by rapine, it behoves you to die like the wolf, mutely fighting, when your time comes. Such was the major's pagan creed, and he faced the consequences of his own escapes ever with the utmost hardihood.

"Ruin you!" he said, at length. "If what we suspect is true, it would be twenty years' penal servitude for you at least, my friend. Stop! hold your tongue!" he cried, seeing that Roxby was about to speak. "We don't know, mind, that it is not Muddlehurst's signature; and, providing you do what you're told, we don't want to know. You'll pay when the time comes, somehow or other, we've no doubt, and if

you did not, Simmonds would not lose over it. Graves and Downham would have to make it good. But, mark me, you will do what we wish, or — "

Roxby raised his face inquiringly.

"We shall make inquiries of Muddlehurst," concluded the major, dryly.

The utter collapse of the specious scoundrel was almost painful to witness. He was but as dough now in the hands of his iron adversary. The major was quite put out at finding himself pitted against so flaccid a foe. He could not help marvelling how he had ever allowed such a craven to get the best of him.

For once in his life he had been most thoroughly deceived in his estimate of his neighbor. He had deemed Roxby as hard and unscrupulous a rascal as it was possible to meet. As he said afterwards to his employer: —

"I did think he'd have shown fight, but he gave in without a ghost of a struggle."

"What is it you want of me?" inquired the utterly broken-down financier humbly at length. "I am in your hands to write, sign, or do what you will."

"You're so far lucky that we don't want much of you," returned the major. "You will write at once to Miss Stanbury to say you regret you have been mistaken in your opinion of Captain Detfield's character; that you have been misinformed; that he may have been a little imprudent, like other young men, but has doubtless seen his folly; has had a severe lesson, in short; and, as you find your ward's feelings are really involved, you have no hesitation about giving your consent. There, you know the sort of letter to write well enough. To do you justice, nobody understands the intensely plausible business better than you do."

"What else?"

"Nothing beyond a note to me to say that you have done so. You get off cheap; it will cost you nothing, but swallowing a little ill-temper with regard to Detfield, whom, of course, we shall stay all proceedings against."

"It shall be done," replied Roxby, in a low voice; "but what security am I to have that all shall end here?"

"None, — you're in no position to demand any; but you may rest assured, that as long as you meet this bill when due, and throw no obstacles in the way of this marriage, you are perfectly safe. And now, once more, good-by."

"Good-by," said Roxby, faintly.

But again did the major turn with his hand on the door.

"One bit of advice before I go. I don't recommend you either to delay or humbug about that letter, because I shall know the truth almost immediately. And, further, I'd advise you to be straight in your dealings in future; you haven't pluck to turn rogue successfully." With which parting shot the major jubilantly closed the door behind him. He had done his duty by Roxby at last.

As for the latter, he remained long seated at his desk, struggling with the contending passions of rage and fear; furious at the idea that he must succumb to Detfield, the man who has told him without scruple that he was a scoundrel; furious at the thought of that five thousand pounds which had slipped through his fingers; furious that

Claxby Jenkens, whom he had long regarded as his tool, should have suddenly developed into his master; but too utterly cowed to think of resisting Simmonds' ultimatum. Still a cowardly rogue is ever a slippery customer to deal with, and it may be that Roxby will prove too many for his adversaries yet.

As far as the forgery went, it was by no means his first offence. When pressed for money in his business, he had often drawn bills, and written some well-known city man's name as the endorser. As such bills had lain quietly at Graves and Downham's till due, and then been always promptly met, no question had ever been raised concerning them. But for the mistake of a partner, not quite, as yet, conversant with the business of the firm, that fatal note had never been in Simmonds' hands.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MR. ROXBY'S CONVERSION.

ROSENEATH HOUSE has been somewhat sad these last few days. Bessie is in dire tribulation about her lover. Were he in the dungeons of the Inquisition, and liable to be "put to the question," she could scarce take a more gloomy view of his incarceration. It is natural; imprisonment to the imagination of a girl of eighteen, of Bessie's class, is apt to be associated with bolts, bars, the vaulted cell, scarce glimmers of daylight, fetters, and bread and water.

She thinks Charlie and his friend, Fox Brine, both in league to conceal from her his sufferings. She knows he must be enduring hardships too dreadful to think of. She is anxious, very anxious, to visit him in his dungeon; very emphatic always on that epithet is Bessie in pleading with Miss Matilda to accompany her on this mission. Soft-hearted Aunt Clem sympathizes thoroughly with her niece; but Miss Matilda is inexorable, bids the girl have a little patience, and she will find all will come right.

"But it's so heartless not to go and comfort him," cries Bessie.

"Most unladylike to go trapezing about a debtor's prison," retorts Miss Matilda.

"A wife cannot stop to think of such conventionalities when her husband is in trouble," urges Bessie. "And am I not, or should I not be, the same to him now?"

"It is hard upon the child, Matilda, not to let her pay her betrothed one tiny visit," interposed Aunt Clem.

"You're quite as big a baby as she is, Clementina," replied Miss Matilda, austerely, "and know nothing at all of what is fitting under such circumstances. I am doing my best both for him and for her."

Miss Matilda, indeed, had sundry long interviews with her lawyer at this time. She had desired him to put himself in communication with Captain Detfield's man of business, for the chivalrous old lady contemplated nothing less than that she and Aunt Clem should discharge Detfield's liabilities, Bessie giving her an assurance that such money should be paid back when she came of age.

She had said nothing of this to her sister, but she felt quite sure of her acquiescence. As the stronger mind, she had thoroughly controlled Miss Clementina all her life.

Miss Matilda was far too good a woman of business not to know how worthless a minor's guarantee would be in the eyes of the law; but she was far too good a judge of character to doubt for one moment that it would be paid when Bessie came into possession of her own. It was due principally to Miss Matilda's business habits and conservative tendencies that Bessie's fortune had not before this slipped through the fingers of the plausible Roxby.

Often had that specious gentleman urged upon his co-trustee the advisability of transferring Bessie's money into far more profitable investments, — pointed out the absurdity of being content with four per cent. when concerns returning six were plentiful as blackberries. But Miss Matilda invariably quoted the Duke of Wellington's dictum, that high interest meant bad security, and vowed no risk should be run with the trust while she had aught to say to it.

"Poor James invested it carefully for his little girl, when his health obliged him to give up business, and he knew what he was about," Miss Stanbury would observe, dryly. "Let it be."

The Stanburys were of fair family. There had been three of them to start with, — the two maiden ladies we know, and a brother, Bessie's father, long since dead. They had inherited ten thousand pounds apiece. The sisters lived quietly and comfortably on the interest of their money. The brother embarked in business, married, had one child; lost his wife, and then, having turned his ten thousand pounds into thirty, fell into a rapid consumption, which carried him off in something less than two years. He left Bessie, then about ten years old, to the joint guardianship of his eldest sister and Roxby.

That he had dealt in cheese, among other things, was undoubtedly true; but it had been on a large scale, and as a mere part of a large business, and scarce warranted Roxby's flippant assertion that he had made his fortune "in cheese."

There are coal-dealers and coal-dealers, from the Marquis of Silkstone, who sells by the hundred thousand tons at the pit mouth, to Bob Ackers, who vends them by the pound, or shovelful, in the neighborhood of Newport Market.

That Miss Matilda was engaged in some deep, mysterious scheme of her own was, of course, palpable both to her niece and sister; that it had reference to helping the lovers out of their present embarrassment, they had her own word for, — the embarrassment, by the way, Charlie Detfield's solely, in reality; but then man's embarrassment always extends to the woman attached to him. His male friends may grieve, be sorry for him, but it is the women who carry sore hearts on such occasions.

Poor Bessie was in no unmaidenly hurry for her marriage, but it seemed so hard to the frank, true-hearted girl, that she could not make use of a part of all this money to free the man she loved so dearly, from his entanglements. Still, there was the fact, she could do nothing; was not even allowed to go and see him in his trouble.

It never occurred to any of the ladies at Roseneath House that Charlie Detfield had been anything but imprudent and unfortunate. They connected his arrest vaguely with his quarrel with Roxby, upon which occasion they considered he had behaved "nobly." That his difficulties were the result of extravagance and self-indulgence they would have put aside, with much disdain, had it been suggested to them.

Bessie and Aunt Clem are sitting rather moodily over their breakfast, when Miss Matilda enters and exclaims: —

"Good-morning, Clementina. Good-morning, Bessie. What will you give for my news this morning?" and she waved a letter she held in her hand triumphantly before them.

That Miss Stanbury was the herald of good tidings, her jubilant manner left no doubt about, and "What is it?" burst simultaneously from the lips of her hearers.

"Mr. Roxby has taken his time to reply to my letter, there's no denying, but it seems to have had the desired effect at last. There, Bessie," she continued, tossing the missive she had flourished so ostentatiously, across to her niece, "that's his consent to your marriage. Now, you know, you have only me to deal with."

The astonishment of Aunt Clem and Bessie was unbounded; they read the letter twice over together before they could believe it. The major was right when he had told the financier that he was a master of the plausible business, — nothing could have been more suasive, nothing more oily, so to speak, than Roxby's epistle. He had embodied the major's suggestions in honeyed terms, winding up with an elaborate apology that too much zeal for his ward's interests should have betrayed him into intemperate language.

He could not give better proof of his penitence, he conceived, than by promoting as speedily as might be the marriage which, under mistaken notions, he had so rancorously, — yes, he must confess, rancorously opposed. Captain Detfield's difficulties, he had heard from good authority, were all in process of arrangement, and would be speedily settled.

As for Miss Matilda, she attributed all this change in Roxby's views to that sharp letter with which she had favored him, and which had so long remained unanswered. The good lady plumed herself not a little on having brought her recalcitrant co-trustee to his bearings, and conceived her dignified but stinging rebuke quite accounted for the humble peroration of his courteous epistle. That she should dissert a little on her own talents, for dealing with people who required both reprimand and convincing of the errors of their opinions, was but natural, and Aunt Clem was lost in real admiration of her sister's cleverness.

But Bessie could not help thinking of Mr. Roxby's rascally proposition to Charlie Detfield; then she mused on his coarse, violent behavior to herself and Miss Stanbury, on the occasion of his last visit, and the girl felt intuitively that some other influence had been brought to bear upon her unprincipled guardian to make him eat his words in this fashion. She could not help feeling some mistrust of this sudden

assent to her marriage, couched in such honeyed terms. To use homely words, it sounded too good to be true.

But it was not only in Barnsbury road that Mr. Roxby's conversion had made a stir. In that dingy, window-barred house in Cursitor street, over which the usurious Coleman held sway, there was much marvel. Charlie Detfield, though naturally sanguine in temperament, had not placed much faith in the major's letter. There is something demoralizing, I mean to the animal spirits, in imprisonment in the first instance, be that imprisonment made light as may be.

When, like Sterne's starling, man first awakes to the fact that he "can't get out," he droops, mopes, and becomes despondent. Time alleviates this, and it is possible, no doubt, to arrive at the supine selfishness that Mr. Dorritt attained after some years' experience of the Marshalsea. But in the beginning the bolts bite, the bars gnaw, and to the generality of men comes great depression. The prison listlessness steals over them. Capacity for work evaporates, and the mental languor increases daily. It is good for our criminals that they are compelled to labor. Imprisonment for any length of time without

"Labor, the symbol of man's punishment,"

is to slay him morally and intellectually. There are exceptions, of course. Strong minds are exceptional.

Detfield, fast succumbing to this apathy, is aroused once more by a second letter from the major, which he reads again and again, and still can hardly believe in:—

"John street, Adelphi,
"Friday.

"DEAR DETFIELD,—Roxby and I have had our little game; I beat him, as I told you I should, and he had to make terms. That your affairs can interest me will, no doubt, puzzle you; but it so happens they do. Your one thousand to fifteen chance has come off, and you will find that Roxby has given unqualified consent to your marriage. This, I need scarcely point out, places you in a very different position, and your lawyer, or man of business, will find Simmonds now easy to deal with. Willing to give time, apply for remission of sentence, in fact facilitate your views in every way. I speak with authority; to say nothing of its being so obviously his best chance of getting his money, that he would be mad to act otherwise.

"Accept my congratulations on your bridal, and remember you are somewhat indebted to me should I ever require a favor at your hands.

"Yours sincerely,
"CLAXBY JENKENS."

Although his battle with Roxby had been a labor of love, and fought strictly in the interest of his employer, Simmonds; yet the major could not resist putting in his

claim for recompense of some sort to the man who would so much benefit by his victory.

He had no particular idea just then of what it was that he would have, but he would have deemed he was failing in his duty to himself had he not sought to establish a pull of some kind over Detfield. Major Jenkens was conscientious past all conception in doing his duty to himself.

Circumstances make men intimate, whom it is hard to conceive amalgamating. It is wonderful what that necessity for "talk," common to the run of mankind, will do in this way. Who, that has travelled, has not seen scores of instances of this? The railway traveller that unbosoms himself, and blurts out his whole family history between London and York, is an every-day type. You must be terribly morose, or clothed in surpassing hauteur, if you have never become the recipient of such confidences. One has been asked to lunch, to dine, even to stay, the first time you should be in the neighborhood. You may take such protestations *cum grano salis*, or you may take them *en vérité*. I declare, when taken as the latter, I don't think you would be deceived in most instances.

Charlie Detfield in the, to put it delicately, close seclusion of Mr. Coleman's mansion, has fraternized strongly with Mr. Turbottle. Wide as the poles, the status of a dandy of the Household Brigade and a "Cheap Jack." True, equally wide the position of a peer of the realm and a *ci-devant* pot-boy, of a baronet and an ex-stable lad. Still, in the now extinct plunging era, such instances were. The turf leads to queer fraternization; so did the railway mania. The Stock Exchange boasts, doubtless, of similar incongruities. The only true republic is that of money-getting, in which the peasant is kotooed to and respected by the peer, should the latter hold the former's information superior to his own.

The old Railway King could have told some strange stories had he liked. I have known a bookmaker who has been requested to mark a marchioness' racing card before the day's sport began. There is not, therefore, so much cause for astonishment as might be at first supposed for the fraternization of Detfield and Mr. Turbottle. The turf has been spoken of as a leveller of classes. A sponging-house acts upon its inmates pretty much as a steam-roller on the newly metalled road,—apt to weld its inhabitants together.

Mr. Turbottle, with his quaint humor and racy observations on men and manners, had done much to lighten the weary hours of Detfield's imprisonment. That eccentric worthy had conceived a strong liking for his fellow-captive, whom he graphically described as "not half a bad sort, considering he was born a swell. It does come a little rough on them, you see, when they find 'emselves in Queer street. They aint used to it; at all events he aint as yet."

Mr. Turbottle happened to be in high force the morning on which Detfield received the major's letter.

"What a blessing it is, captain, having plenty of time to read the papers, isn't it? And what a blessing it is for old Coleman, having inmates who will see 'em," he

remarked, turning over the "Telegraph." "Charge one sixpence a day for this here pennyworth, he does, so help me. A man who can't make capital out of his misfortunes aint fit to be in 'em. I tell you what I mean to do," and here Mr. Turbottle indulged in a perfect volley of winks. "As soon as I'm out I shall set up in this line; it's the most screaming trade ever I saw drove. If you can't make a fortune at this game, why, you never will; as an old pal, captain, you give me a turn if ever you're Cursitor street way again. What, you won't?" continued Mr. Turbottle, in answer to Detfield's smile, and relapsing into the patter of his own trade. "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do with you. I'll do you half price, and throw you a Sunday dinner in. Aint that good enough? Well, you settle up with Coleman before you say no."

"This letter I've just received tells me that I shall be released in a few days. I own I don't quite understand how, but I presume my lawyer, when he comes, will be able to explain."

"What, going out? Dash it all! be a man, captain. Blessed if I didn't think you'd made up your mind, like myself, not to part with a mag, but to serve your time out."

Mr. Turbottle labored under a delusion not easy to dissipate; namely, that completing his term of imprisonment would effectually wipe out the costs for which he stood committed. Keeping that money out of the pocket of the man whom he considered had dealt unfairly with him was the sole reason of his obstinate resolve not to pay. Like the immortal Pickwick, he was in prison on principle.

"I shan't stay here an hour longer than I can help," replied Charlie, dryly. "I have good reasons for wishing to be at liberty."

"Oh, there aint much difficulty about finding reasons for that," retorted Mr. Turbottle. "You might want to stretch your legs, or require change of scene. I never was in a place that furnished so many reasons for wishing to be away from it. I don't want to be inquisitive, nor to squash the hope that springs perennial,—I mean is always cropping up in the human bosom, as Shakespeare has it, but hope's a rum 'un at telling 'a flattering tale much longer than my arm,' you know."

"I think I can put faith in my correspondent," replied Charlie; "Claxby Jenkens don't make many mistakes, and he happens to know thoroughly how I am situated."

"Claxby Jenkens!" exclaimed Mr. Turbottle, bouncing off the sofa.

"Yes; do you know him?" inquired Detfield, somewhat curiously.

"Oh, I know him, and he knows me," replied the little man, somewhat abstractedly. "But surely your friend spoke of him as a scoundrel the other day. What, pray, do you think of him?"

"Well, he's a man the world throws hard names at; but he has always dealt fairly by me, and, if I may trust his letter, has done me a real good turn now."

"I haven't seen him for a good bit, but it strikes me I must. You don't think him an out-and-outer, then, eh?" and Mr. Turbottle peered inquisitively into his companion's face.

"I have told you fairly what I know of him; but there's no doubt many people, like Fox Brine, judge him much more hardly than I do."

"I must see him—I must see him," murmured Mr. Turbottle. "Surely, he'd never play Cissy false. If he has, he might be pretty certain I wouldn't stand her being put upon."

"Going out, eh?" he continued, once more addressing himself to Detfield. "What's it feel like? A skin full of gin-punch aint a circumstance to it, I s'pose. Blessed if one understands liberty till one's been under the lock.

"'I'm for freedom of opinion
Throughout this here dominion;
'Bout paying one's debts, especially let's
Have freedom of opinion,'"

sang Mr. Turbottle *con spirito*, and then betook himself seriously to smoking.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE EXPLANATION.

THERE are crises in history when events follow each other with startling rapidity, when we may almost, as in the days of the terrible French and German struggle, be said to listen for the moaning of the wires; to strain our ears for the wailing of the Œolian harp of the nineteenth century,—the electric telegraph. Did the harp of old ever send forth sadder music than the mournful story of Sedan or Gravelotte, as wafted to us by the flashing strings of that of our day?

So in the lives of us all comes the time when we live years in hours. In the most prosaic existence there has happened what has seemed to it a convulsion.

Cissy is living such a life now. To her every twenty-four hours is loaded with hope, with terror. She is sanguine of clearing her fair fame; she trembles for that flickering life she loves so well; for the fruition of that love she has awoke to, it may be too late.

Much gratified has she been this morning (it is the day after her visit to Lizzie) by a call from John Paynter. Lizzie Paynter, with all her faults, could be a very true friend. She had always refused to entertain a doubt of Cissy's innocence; after their mutual explanation, she was, of course, more firmly convinced of it than ever.

Her first impulse had been to ask Cissy immediately to come and stay with them till she was able to re-enter her husband's house, with all that miserable scandal refuted. But Mrs. Paynter remembered that she also had a husband, and that, easy-going and far from straight-laced as John Paynter was, he could upon occasion put his foot down firmly.

There had been a case or two in which people of reputation, rather more tainted than careless, good-natured Lizzie had been aware of, had obtained a footing in her

house, and she recollected the peremptory manner in which they had been struck off her visiting list.

John Paynter interfered but little with his wife, yet he was too much about the world of London not to know, very shortly, all about those who might cross his threshhold; not the man to tolerate characters past all bleaching in his drawing-room.

Lizzie, of course, knew that her husband took a different view from herself concerning Cissy's conduct; but she knew, also, that it was no strongly prejudiced opinion regarding it. If he thought the worst, it was sorrowfully, and with regret that the facts, so far as he knew them, enabled him to come to no other conclusion.

Lizzie invaded the sanctuary of the smoking-room that night, with bold, deliberate intention; an intrusion which, wise in her generation, she never committed, save on great occasions. Did wives comprehend what sparing use of such invasion may be made, they would treasure up the "insidious charm" carefully. It bears not always rubbing, like Aladdin's lamp; use it too often, and its efficacy wanes, waxes weaker and weaker, and at last dies out. Like those other "charms," opiates; alcohol and nicotine, 'tis the abuse, not the use, that brings us to woe and utter discomfiture.

Lizzie, at all events, thoroughly comprehended the advantage of keeping such battle-ground for grand assaults, and not wasting that opportune position in conjugal skirmishes. Her husband knew well that when Lizzie ascended to the smoking-room she had something serious to unbosom herself of.

She told him Cissy's story in her own quaint, though not quite sincere, fashion. It was hardly likely that she would reveal that scene at Montague Gore's chambers, in all its integrity, for instance. Still she did make him understand that interfering between them, in defiance of his advice, she had so far further complicated matters as to make Cissy jealous of herself. That, combined with Montague's jealous innuendoes, had driven Cissy wild, and, in a moment of passionate excitement, she had levanted to Brompton-super-Mare.

"As for Major Jenkens, she says that within a day or two he shall himself declare what the mysterious relation between them is, and that it will leave no ground for the shadow of suspicion when you do but know it; and John, dear, as I have been in some measure the cause of her trouble, I do hope you will let me ask her here. It's so shocking to think of her refused admission to her husband's house; a husband, mind, as I've told you all along — and I'm right here — that she is passionately attached to. If you wouldn't mind, it would please me so very much. Had you only seen her to-day, I am sure you would have done it yourself. Do it now, for my sake," and Lizzie laid her hands on her husband's shoulder, and looked wistfully down into his face.

John Paynter threw his cigar into the fire, and exclaimed: —

"You know, Liz, it came very much against the grain with me to think wrong of Cissy Gore. I'm uncommonly glad to think I'm mistaken, and that she, at all events, can flatly deny the scandal. I'll call upon her myself, to-morrow, and ask her here.

It will show people that we no longer credit it, any way. Still, she must right herself, remember."

"And she will, and that speedily," cried Lizzie, jubilantly. "I don't know quite what to call you, John, without being slang; but you're a dear, good fellow, if that will do, — and that."

John Paynter bore his salutation calmly, — husbands, I suppose, do, even when their wives are not wont to be effusive, — but he was prompt to his word, and called on Mrs. Gore at the Langham, next morning.

But Cissy was firm in her refusal of his invitation. That she was extremely pleased with it, she made no disguise.

"It is very kind of you," she said. "It is a great comfort to me to think that you believe me guiltless; that you credit me when I say I can dissipate this infamous scandal before the week is out. Yet I'll not so far take advantage of your compassion as to become your guest while this stain rests upon my name. Nay, further; one moment, please," she cried, seeing that he was about to speak, "I'll be no one's guest till my right to the shelter of my husband's roof is once more established. You won't deem me ungrateful, I know. Think for two minutes, and you will say, — if she is innocent, she is right."

"You are," returned John Paynter, warmly. "Not that I am withdrawing my offer for one instant, but your woman's wit serves you better than our blundering, though good intentions. Remember, I'll stand by you all I can, and so will Lizzie."

"Thank you, Mr. Paynter, I know it," replied Cissy, softly; "but you can only aid me in this matter so far. It is for me to justify myself; I can — I shall. But I cannot wait till my husband is fit to hear my exculpation, — my post should be at his side *now*. I am anxious — anxious indeed, I am frantic — to resume my rights. If Montague should die without my hand to smooth his pillow, to solace his last moments, I shall never hold my head up more; when I think how far my foolishness may have occasioned his illness, I don't think I could even then. What I have to ask of you is this. Will you and Lizzie consent to hear my justification, and take care that Mr. Brine is present? You three thoroughly satisfied, and no one shall say me nay about claiming my undoubted right to watch over my husband."

"Of course, certainly; as I said before, command me in any way," replied John Paynter.

"To-morrow, then, expect me with my evidence. I myself will write to Mr. Brine to meet me at your house at twelve."

"All shall be as you wish, Mrs. Gore; and no one can more sincerely wish you well through all your troubles than I do. Good-by."

"Good-by, Mr. Paynter," replied Cissy. And then that gentleman resumed his way to the city, prepared to stake his existence on the innocence of the woman whom twenty-four hours ago he had held guilty past all dispute.

So often as people are condemned, socially, without evidence, it is well, perhaps, that they should be occasionally also exculpated on similar foundation. A shrewd,

sagacious man is John Paynter, but, logically, he has less reason to acquit Cissy than he has to consider the charge against her proven.

An innocent woman we know her; but John Paynter has changed his views on nothing more than his wife's cajoleries, and Mrs. Gore's bold denial of the scandal concerning her. Such proofs would have done little to convince him on a matter of business, yet cleverer men than he would have believed as he did in this instance.

A note, the first thing next morning, from Brine, told Cissy that sleep, so long prayed for, had at length sealed her husband's eyelids. The crisis of the fever, the deathlike slumber, when the poor, troubled brain at last ceases to wrestle with the phantoms that possess it, has come; that phase of all cerebral excitement, when the watchers can mutely and nervously but wait the awaking of the sufferer. If sense accompanies not the cessation of slumber, then indeed the patient's hold of life waxes slender. If it should, then infinite is the care necessary to withdraw the stricken one from the Valley of the Shadow of Death, to nurse back into a flame those faint embers of life that such terrible struggle with the Destroyer has left. Cissy knew all this well. She had consulted doctors and books on brain fever during the last forty-eight hours. It was good news that at last he slept. The awaking was in the hands of Him who ruleth all things.

Those who remembered Cissy in her Paris days would have been struck speechless with astonishment if they could have seen the energetic, calm woman she had become in her trouble. Forced to think now entirely for herself, she is foreseeing, self-reliant, and patient. One idea possesses her. She must win Montague back, must clear herself of all stain in his eyes. If the precious boon of his life is not to be granted to her, then in pity's sake let it be conceded that he should understand she was guiltless, if foolish; let him kiss and forgive her before he should be torn from her. Time is precious; — this terrible fever, who shall say how it may terminate? She wants all her faculties. She must be sitting by her husband's bedside when he awakes.

Loth as he was to leave his friend at such a crisis, yet Fox Brine saw at once that his duty to his friend was to restore his wife to him before all things, if possible. Prejudiced strongly against Cissy he had been, no doubt, but his opinion concerning her had been much modified by their last interview.

"She spoke like an innocent woman," muttered Fox to himself. "If she can in the main substantiate her story, I would acquit her, and trust to time to clear up some little discrepancies, if such there be.".

Leaving stringent orders that word should be instantly despatched to him of Montague's awaking, Mr. Brine betook himself to the Paynters. He found Lizzie in a state of great agitation. Honest anxiety for her friend, leavened with a perfect tremor of curiosity, had reduced Mrs. Paynter to that state in which to sit still becomes an impossibility. Her husband, though much calmer, as behoved his masculine dignity, still awaited Cissy's promised explanation with considerable interest.

A few minutes past twelve and a servant announced Mrs. Gore.

Cissy, very quietly dressed, entered the room, followed by a gentleman who was at once recognized by all. She bowed generally to the trio, and with a motion of her hand checked Lizzie, who was coming forward to greet her.

"Allow me to introduce to you, Major Claxby Jenkens," she paused for a moment, and then added in clear, steady tones, — "my father." Taking no notice of the varied signs of astonishment visible in the faces of her hearers, she continued, — "I shall leave my exculpation in my father's hands. Will you be kind enough to listen to his story?"

Claxby Jenkens advanced a step or two, and quietly took off his accustomed spectacles.

"I shall not," he said, "detain you long. Let me say in the first place that my daughter has been loyal to a promise I exacted from her under other circumstances, but which I still gave her positive injunctions to respect, namely, the concealment of my very existence from her world. I have been an intriguer, a schemer, all my life; but that the world could ever put me down as my daughter's lover I must own never entered my head. The old story," he said sadly, — "we never can see anything except from our own point of view."

"But are you really Cissy's father?" exclaimed Lizzie, who could restrain herself no longer.

"Hush!" said her husband, as he laid his hand on her arm.

"I must go back a good bit," replied the major, taking no manner of notice of the interruption, "but I promise to be brief. Some five-and-twenty years ago I was a subaltern of artillery, quartered at Nottingham. I fell in love with a very pretty girl there, the daughter of a tobacconist it ended in my running away with and marrying her.

"My commanding officer was very wroth with my escapade; so were the townspeople generally, — he, because I had made her an honest woman; the latter, because they persistently maintained I had not. Neither she nor I had a very pleasant time of it, and after a little I determined to leave the service, and resigned my commission accordingly. We went abroad; how we lived matters little, we scrambled along somehow; but at the end of three years I lost her, and I can say honestly the saddest day of my life was when I laid her in her grave at Père-la-Chaise.

"She left me one child, — the woman who now stands before you. What was I to do with a little thing two years old? What I did, was to take her back to Nottingham, and place her with my wife's sister, who was by that time married, and whose husband was assisting his father-in-law in the management of the shop. If she was rather hard, she was a just woman, and I knew I could rely upon her to do her duty by my child.

"As for my own relations, they were not many. I had alienated them by various escapades, and they were only too glad to make my marriage an occasion for breaking with me altogether."

"Stop!" exclaimed Brine. "You and Turbottle married sisters, by Heaven! and therefore you know — "

"A good deal, Mr. Brine, you wish to learn, if you will only allow me to tell it," replied the major, blandly. "It always is hard to induce people to listen patiently, even to that."

"Please be quiet," interposed John Paynter.

Cissy, her hand grasping the back of a chair, listened with unmoved countenance to her own biography. What did it all matter to her? It was but a means to an end, reconciliation with her husband, — reconciliation with the man she loved, permission, nay, the right to sit by his sick-bed. How tedious her father was, she thought; but her faith in his talents and knowledge of the world never swerved. It was necessary, she supposed, this weary recapitulation, if he thought so. For herself she deemed, when she had said this is my father, when he had said this is my daughter, everything was made clear. The major knew better.

"For ten years," he continued, "Cissy lived there; then I took her abroad and placed her in a convent at St. Germains. She left that only to be married to Mark Hemsworth. From that date she was before the Paris world, as Mrs. Paynter can testify. I can see you believe me, but I am a man of business. Unwittingly I have raised a terrible scandal against the one being in this world I have to love. Her innocence cannot be made too clear. Here are my proofs. There is an attested copy of my marriage with Cecilia Blackburn, at St. Sepulchre's Church, Holborn, — easy to verify that within two hours. This is an attested copy of Cissy's birth in Paris, the truth of which can be ascertained in a couple of days. Is that sufficient?"

"Certainly," replied John Paynter.

"Mrs. Gore, I humbly ask your pardon!" said Fox Brine.

"Cissy, my darling!" cried Lizzie, advancing towards her.

"One moment, please!" exclaimed the major, in sharp, peremptory tones. "You deem that enough; I don't. I can afford to leave no link wanting in this evidence. If Mr. Paynter will favor me by ringing the bell and telling some one to ask the gentleman below to step up, I shall introduce to you an irreproachable witness of my story. No one more capable of pronouncing on his veracity than Mr. Brine."

John Paynter gave the necessary order, and, like his wife and Brine, awaited with intense curiosity the appearance of the new-comer.

Another minute, and a sleek, bright-eyed little man entered the room, bowed respectfully to the company, and, then crossing over, drew Cissy's arm within his own.

"Mr. Turbottle!" ejaculated Brine, with the utmost amazement.

"Exactly," interposed the major; "also the uncle with whom Cissy was brought up; also the co-trustee with myself to that settlement for which you have been so long searching. He told you and Mr. Gore the whole story about a year ago, if you remember, when neither of you were aware of my existence, nor dreamed that my daughter would ever be Mr. Gore's wife. The settlement-deed, lying at Firth and Chillingham's bank in Nottingham, would alone be indisputable evidence."

"How do you do, Mr. Turbottle?" exclaimed Brine, as he crossed to shake hands

with that worthy. "I certainly can vouch to having heard this story at the George Inn, Nottingham. Don't think I have a doubt; but how did you turn up so opportunely?"

"I knew where he was as well as you did," replied the major. "I went to him last night, and we had a long talk together. It was not likely that he would fail Cissy in her trouble any more than myself."

"No," replied the little man, huskily. "It went ag'in' the grain to give in to that Chowner, of course; but when the child I had dandled so often on my knee wanted me, I was bound to come, naturally, at any sacrifice. Reg'lar bit of the old business, sir," he continued, turning to Brine, — "giving up the money, and paying, leastways Coleman, very handsome to take it."

But here Mrs. Paynter dashed swiftly across the room, and caught Cissy in her arms just, as with a slight gurgle in her throat, she was on the point of swooning.

"Help me to put her on the sofa, John, and then take them all downstairs, and send Justine here. She is only a little bit hysterical, and will be right again in a few minutes. You will not go, Mr. Brine?"

"Not without Mrs. Gore, if possible."

Lizzie nodded, and turned towards her patient.

Mrs. Paynter was right. A few choking sobs, a short burst of tears, and then, after swallowing a stiff dose of sal-volatile and water, Cissy pronounced herself able and anxious to leave.

"You are satisfied, are you not?" she whispered to her friend. "They all are, — is it not so? And I may go to Montague at once?"

"Yes, dear. I never doubted you myself," replied her friend; "and as for the others, Mr. Brine is waiting below to conduct you home. God bless you, Cissy, and grant that your husband may be restored to you! Come!"

"Mrs. Gore," said Fox Brine, as he handed her into the brougham, "I have just received a note to say that Montague has awoke, and is conscious. Remember, he is weak as a child. You will want all your self-control. Can you trust yourself?"

"You shall see," replied Cissy, softly, her face irradiated with a smile of inexpressible sweetness. "I have gone through my hour of agony; I feel that he will come back to me. Don't fear that my nerves will fail me again."

CHAPTER XLV.

A GAY WEDDING.

CHARLIE DETFIELD is again at liberty. He has shaken the dust from his shoes, and crossed the threshold of the rapacious Coleman with a sense of inexpressible relief. He hardly knows how it has all come about, but most assuredly beneficent fairies have come to his assistance in a manner that his merits little warrant; in a

fashion that rarely happens to the impecunious of these days, reminding one of the stock-uncle of the old comedies.

"Always possessed
Of fortune so truly romantic,
Of money so ready that, right or wrong,
It always is ready to go for a song,
Throwing it, going it, pitching it strong,
They ought to have purses as green and long
As the cucumber called the gigantic."

There were one or two mysterious conferences betwixt Miss Stanbury's lawyer and his own man of business; and then the latter announced to Detfield that all his difficulties were settled.

"I have succeeded in borrowing as much money as will suffice for the present, sir," said Charlie's solicitor, "at five per cent.; but do you know that the person advancing this sum and your principal creditor, Simmonds, both make the same stipulation?"

"What's that?" inquired Detfield.

"Ha! ha! it's rather an odd condition; but I have already pledged myself for your compliance with it.'

"Well?"

"Ha! ha! they insist upon your being married within six weeks."

"Quite right, as far as I am concerned; but you see it doesn't altogether depend upon me."

"Hum! I don't know. They say, Captain Detfield, you are engaged, and that you can easily be married in that time, if you choose."

"I don't see what that beast Simmonds can know about it," replied Charlie. "But you may tell him, for his comfort, that I shall bring it about as soon as I can."

"Within six weeks, if possible, then, I may say?" inquired the lawyer.

Detfield nodded.

"If I can only persuade Bessie," he muttered, "it certainly shall be within that time."

When he put that question to his *fiancée* a day or two later, the girl hesitated for a moment, then blushing slightly, said: —

"I have never made a secret of my love, Charlie. I told you when all went wrong I would wait, and now I'm yours whenever it pleases you to take me."

Bessie, you see, has really no personal dignity, or maidenly reserve, whatever; she loves with all that innocent frankness which poets suppose to characterize the milk-maid. Better still, she loves as a fair, honest English maiden may, with her very heart upon her lips, and all her soul shining out of the truthful brown eyes.

But then Bessie suggested, she didn't know what Aunt Matilda might say to it, "And she's been so kind, Charlie, of late, that I really cannot go against her, you know."

However, Miss Stanbury accepted the proposition most graciously; said she was no advocate for long engagements; that, as for Captain Detfield, the sooner he was bound over in his good behavior, the better; that, as for Bessie, well, it was best so too. "You couldn't depend on a soldier, of course. Next time he was in difficulties it was as well she should be licensed to visit him, and not threaten to outrage all the proprieties, as she had done only a week or so back."

Bessie bore her aunt's jokes meekly. She was too happy to quarrel with anybody just at present.

Now that he was to be married immediately to an heiress, of course Detfield would have had small difficulty in settling with his creditors; still it was Miss Stanbury who smoothed matters, and became security for him, thereby enabling his solicitor to arrange things upon much more favorable terms than he could have otherwise obtained. Charlie did not know this till many months afterwards.

There was one thing which did weigh heavily upon his mind, and that was leaving the old corps. Of course, he had not been gazetted out as yet. Was it practicable to withdraw his papers?

The first thing to be ascertained was whether "Chummy Vernon" would let him off his bargain.

The chummy, so-called in accordance with some one of those unaccountable caprices which give a man a nickname in the service, was the officer who had agreed to purchase his step, and to him Charlie confided his desire to cancel the arrangement.

"All right," said the "chummy one," "I'd rather have you still with us than get your step. Deuced glad to hear you've pulled through, old fellow! It's rough, too, Charlie, you know, because you're getting married, beside, they tell me, and'll never really go to hounds again; or else a man who rode and drove so hard as you did, gave a chance every hunting season."

"Don't you be afraid," laughed Detfield; "I shan't be further from the hounds because I chance to be a trifle better mounted. The first time we meet at the cover side, chummy, you don't cut me down for a tenner."

"Done," replied the other, grinning; "mind I don't land both the step and the tenner."

A popular man in his regiment, and strongly backed by his chief, Charlie had not much difficulty in recovering his papers.

Gayly go on the preparations for the wedding meanwhile. If there had been excitement at Roseneath House prior to the ball, there was simply delirium now. Aunt Clem was in a state of perpetual flutter, while the way Miss Matilda harried the lawyers, dressmakers, outfitters, etc., all that multitude of people who never keep time, and without whose assistance matrimony is supposed to be unattainable, was a sight to behold. As Charlie irreverently whispered to his *fiancée*:—

"If she was going to be married herself, she couldn't be more desperately in earnest."

"It is very well she is, sir," replied Bessie, with a saucy toss of her head, "that is

if you are. I'm sure my things would never be ready for months, if it was not for the way she worries people."

"And I suppose you couldn't be married without them?" inquired Charlie, with an affectation of gravity.

"No," replied Bessie, solemnly, "quite impossible; no girl was ever married till her things were ready."

Miss Stanbury had her own reasons for hurrying on this wedding. To tell the truth, she dreaded that Mr. Roxby should revoke his decision. Although she believed that it was her own fervid appeal and severe rebuke that had made him yield his consent, and write in the conciliatory way he had done, still Miss Matilda mistrusted Mr. Roxby.

She thought that in his desire to be once more reconciled with herself and Roseneath House, he had hastily assented to this marriage as the easiest way of becoming so; but that he would probably invent some pretext for objecting to it very shortly, had indeed already some half-developed scheme to that effect. Miss Stanbury conceived the best way to prevent any insidious attack of this nature was by hurrying the marriage as much as possible.

After the manner of Napoleon, Miss Matilda intended to give her adversary no time to reform, little dreaming that he was morally annihilated, and utterly at the dictation of men who had this marriage as much at heart as herself.

It had been decided emphatically by Aunt Matilda that it should be a very gay wedding, if she could make it so.

"We've no other niece to marry, Clem, so we'll do the thing royally, this once. Then it's a real love-match, without being a pauper affair," continued Miss Stanbury. "The savings of Bessie's minority will about pay his debts, and they'll have a very nice income to set up house on. We will marry Bessie with all the honors."

There was a large muster at St. Mary's Church, Islington, one bright autumn morning, and amongst the throng are several of those who have figured more or less prominently in this history. Notable amongst them is Mr. Roxby, with a bouquet in his button-hole, a vast expanse of light blue silk waistcoat, and an air of universal benevolence. He has presented Bessie with a magnificent bracelet, and claimed the right of giving her away. Nobody could look the character of father to the bride more completely. Mr. Roxby shakes hands with the wedding-guests generally, patronizingly; if a dearly loved daughter had been about to be married to the son-in-law of his choice he could not have been more effusive. He has taken the whole ceremony under his immediate protection, and seems to be bestowing his benediction on mankind generally in honor of the occasion.

Mr. and Mrs. Paynter are of course there. Charlie has pledged himself to the lady that there is to be nothing clandestine about his marriage; that there are to be six bridesmaids, and a tremendous breakfast to follow. Mr. Paynter has once more found himself constrained to open his purse-strings, and vow that he will never more attend such ceremony; while Lizzie is divided between critical reflections on her own

toilet, and curiosity to see her old admirer wedded to Clementina Stanbury, spinster.

Lounging in one of the pews near the altar is a little man, in a green coat with gilt buttons, holding in his hand a white hat.

Mr. Turbottle considers this last addition to his attire quite in the aspect of a wedding garment. He associates festivity and light-heartedness intimately with the head covering, and has exchanged the gold-banded sombrero of his professional life for the white hat, with much deliberation. Strange to say, Bessie has received no handsomer present than a necklace of pearls from Mr. Turbottle.

"No duffers, you know, captain," said the little man, when he slipped them into Charlie's hand. "They aint part of the stock; never saw Birmingham, that lot, bless you! You give 'em your young woman, with my respectful compliments. They all likes a bit of jewelry. I knows 'em. And if you wouldn't think it a liberty, captain, I should like just to see you turned off."

The eccentric little man was really worth a tidy bit of money, and could well afford to indulge such a whim, when he took the fancy. He had conceived a great liking for Detfield, during the two or three days they had spent together under the roof of the rapacious Coleman, and took this opportunity of showing it.

But now the bridal procession sweeps up the aisle, and groups itself round the altar. Mrs. Paynter leans forward to have a good look at the bride, but Bessie's face happens to be a little averted, and is also somewhat masked by the veil, so she does not succeed.

"'Pon my word! she looks marvellously young," muttered Mrs. Paynter to herself. "Whoever made her up deserves great credit. It will all do very well; there's much virtue in a decent milliner."

The ceremony commenced; and, as the officiating clergyman recited the words, "If either of you know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony," Lizzie gave a tremendous start. She had just discovered Aunt Clem and her sister standing below the steps of the altar, a little in the background.

"John," she whispered, clutching her husband's arms, "stop him. He ought to be stopped; he's marrying the wrong woman."

"She evidently came here to be married, if her get-up goes for anything," chuckled John Paynter, "and Detfield looks as if he thought it all right."

"But it isn't; that's not the heiress. Who on earth can it be?"

At this minute, in answer to the minister's summons, Mr. Roxby advanced to give Bessie away. It occasioned a slight change in her position; the veil fell rather more back, and her face was turned towards Mrs. Paynter.

"A sweetly pretty girl," murmured the lady *sotto voce;* "but who can she be? That's not Miss Clementina Stanbury."

"It must be," replied her husband. "But listen."

Mrs. Paynter did, attentively, until she heard Bessie, in low, tremulous tones, repeat: —

"I, Elizabeth Jane, take thee, Charles," etc.

"If this is a Miss Stanbury, John, I never heard of her," she whispered, solemnly. "Poor Charlie! he's made a mess of it, as usual. That girl's far too pretty to be an heiress. Depend upon it, he's marrying just what will pay his debts, instead of the nugget he ought to have done. So like him," she continued, with a slight touch of asperity; "always caught by a good-looking face to the utter destruction of his real interests."

The ceremony is over, and the guests crowd back to Roseneath House for breakfast. Mr. Roxby proposes the health of the happy couple in a glowing speech, dwelling much upon the amiable and endearing qualities of the bride. He gives the company to understand that she has been to him as a daughter, and that the only consolation he has on parting with her is, that he gives her to the man of her choice, — his noble, manly-hearted, gallant young friend, Captain Detfield; with which peroration, and covering his face with a white handkerchief, Mr. Roxby sits down.

There is a slightly humorous smile on Charlie's lips as he presents his wife to Mrs. Paynter some few minutes before their departure.

"A very old friend, Bessie, who, I trust, will allow us to call upon her on our return."

Lizzie bows, smiles, expresses a hope of making Mrs. Detfield's acquaintance really, when she gets back again, and cannot refrain from shaking her head in mock admonition of her whilom admirer.

"Much too nice for you, sir," she murmurs, as she bids him good-by. "I only hope, Charlie, she has some money. Miss Clementina looks so much more like it."

Wedding breakfasts are not usually festive entertainments. Sustained by copious libations of champagne, we always endeavor strenuously to suppose they are; but who is there over thirty that does not shiver at the idea of having to assist at one? Still this was marked by some hilarity.

Mr. Roxby naturally conceived that the whole affair was under his special patronage. He became simply speechless with wrath when Mr. Fox Brine, who had figured in the character of best man, took the whole conduct of the feast completely out of his hands; insisted, contrary to all etiquette, upon proposing the health of the bridesmaids; and then called upon Mr. Turbottle (who he had already whispered it about was a rich, but eccentric cousin) to return thanks.

How Mr. Turbottle, warmed with wine, entered heartily into the spirit of the proceedings, and, falling back upon his old profession, commenced disposing of the bridesmaids as so many lots, till compelled to sit down by the ubiquitous Brine, must have been seen to be believed.

At last the bride descends, attired for the road. A tear or two glisten in Miss Matilda's eyes, and Aunt Clem gives vent to palpable sobs; hearty hand-squeezes, a somewhat faltering cheer; an old shoe, maladroitly thrown, catches Mr. Roxby, posed majestically at the carriage-door, in the waistcoat; crack goes the whip, and Captain and Mrs. Detfield have departed for the Continent.

CHAPTER XLVI.

RECONCILIATION.

As may be supposed, Fox Brine's intelligence was correct. Montague Gore had awoke, and was in possession of his senses; that is, so far as a man reduced to utter prostration can be said to be possessed of them, — possession, in his case, meaning little more than an indistinct craving for nourishment and stimulant, coupled with a decided and overpowering desire for more sleep.

When Mrs. Gore assumed her place at her husband's bedside, he was once more far away in the realm of Oneiros, and some hours elapsed before he again opened his eyes, and looked dreamily about him.

Too weak almost to whisper, too weak almost to move, yet there was a soft gleam of recognition in his dark eyes, and his wife's heart filled with exultation as the pale lips faintly syllabled: —

"Cissy."

He had for the present utterly forgotten all the suspicious complications that had preceded his illness; he recognized nothing but that the woman he so passionately loved was watching over him; that it was her hand that smoothed his pillow, her hand that lifted the cup to his lips.

Days roll by, and inch by inch Montague Gore wins his way back from the dread border-land, where he has lingered so long. Ever, as he recognizes the untiring devotion of his wife, does he strive to put on one side those dim memories of some grave wrong done to him by Cissy before he fell ill.

It is not all clear to him yet, but recollection is slowly returning, and troubles him like a horrible nightmare. Indeed he tries to persuade himself that the whole thing is a mere phantasm of the brain, — a lingering remnant of the delirium that had possessed him.

Cissy, with her keen, watchful, loving glance, is not blind to what is passing within her husband's mind. She herself is thirsting for an explanation, and only awaits his being stronger to make full confession. But she judges rightly; it is best not to hurry such.

"It must be of that sort," thinks Cissy, "which shall leave no room for another as long as Montague and I may live."

The time comes, one bright day at the beginning of October. Montague has been out for a drive, and the crisp, sharp air has sent the sluggish blood once more like quicksilver through its channels; one of those days upon which we feel our vitality; when the animal runs riot in our veins; when we revel in sheer consciousness that we are alive; one of those days when a convalescent gulps down huge draughts of strength and health, and literally leaps, instead of progresses, towards recovery.

Montague Gore is sitting by the window, looking lazily out at the passers-by, when he is aroused from his abstraction by the light touch of his wife's hand.

"Montie," she says gently, "I want to talk to you. I think now you are strong enough to hear what I have in my heart to say to you; what I have been yearning to say to you for weeks past."

He said nothing, but the dark eyes gazed curiously into her face, and there was a troubled expression about the brow.

"I know," she said, "now, of what the world held me guilty, when I left you, just before your illness. I had no idea what was thought of my flight then, but my eyes have been fully opened since. Montague," she continued, taking his hand between her own, "that I am innocent of aught but foolishness, my being here this instant is proof. Were I a guilty woman, I should never have dared enter your presence again. I am free to speak now; to tell you that my supposed lover is my father. Remember, it might well never occur to me that you should attribute such a character to him. As soon as the scandal reached our ears, my father came forward and told our story to your most intimate friends, and they at once did me justice. Why he wished his existence kept a secret he shall explain to you himself shortly."

"But what made you run away?" inquired Gore.

"Because I was desperately in love with my husband," replied Cissy, blushing.

"A most singular way of showing it," said Montague, smiling.

"But you know it is so?" exclaimed Cissy, eagerly.

"I know that you have taken very great care of me lately, and are the best and dearest nurse in England," said Gore; "but still I don't understand why, loving me, you should run away."

"Because I was a goose — because you shouldn't have glass doors in your chambers — because I was jealous — because you have no right to —" and here Cissy crimsoned to the roots of her hair.

"No right to what?" inquired Gore, fairly bewildered.

"No right to kiss any woman but me."

What Mrs. Paynter would have thought, had she known it, one can't imagine; but, sad to say, Montague, at the moment, had really forgotten all about that unlucky salute, which had led to so much mischief. Had there been any remnant of jealousy still lurking in Cissy's breast it must have been dissipated by the utter want of comprehension visible in her husband's countenance. Lizzie had undoubtedly told her the truth; it was palpable that kiss carried no recollections with it.

"I don't understand, Cissy," he murmured, at last.

"Ah! you will, if you think of the day Lizzie Paynter came down to see you in the Temple, and reflect that you have badly glazed doors to your rooms. I shall run away now, Montie; when I come back, you will know all about it."

When Cissy returned, her husband had remembered all; but it made their reconciliation no less complete, and Montague Gore knew that his wife's heart was his at last.

A little later, and the major called and told his story, explained his somewhat far-strained reasons for keeping his existence so long a secret, and handed over his trust. Whatever his intentions might at one time have been concerning it, he had been scrupulously honest, and the moneys derived from the big farm in Nottinghamshire, which constituted Cissy's settlement, were lying untouched in the names of himself and Mr. Turbottle at the Nottingham bankers', to whom they had been paid of late.

During Mark Hemsworth's life they had, of course, been lodged in his name. It was only after his death, and in complete ignorance of what had become of the widow, that the bankers had opened an account with the trustees. Of these, of course, the major had been the most active agent; and it was not till Fox Brine's vituperation of him at Coleman's that Mr. Turbottle conceived it was possible that he could meditate wronging his daughter.

The little man had been much disturbed at that idea, and had meditated putting himself into communication with Brine, when the major's sudden visit, prior to the explanation at the Paynters', had once more convinced him that Claxby Jenkens was loyal to Cissy.

Mr. Roxby had, at one time, conceived serious thoughts of levanting to America; but he reflected that there was an extradition treaty with that country, and that Simmonds was likely to be a relentless foe. He accordingly stood to his bargain, and is yet a shining light in the financial world. Simmonds and his old friend, Claxby Jenkens, alone being aware how near he once was to obtaining "permanent employment" in one of her majesty's convict establishments.

In conclusion, I can only add that Mr. Fox Brine's novel is still anxiously awaited by his friends and acquaintance. Perhaps, with the American humorist, he holds that if to publish seldom be good, to publish seldomer must be better.

THE END.

IN THE CAMARGUE.

BY EMILY BOWLES.

Neat Paper Cover, 50 cents. *Handsome Cloth, $1.00.*

LORING, Publisher, . . . BOSTON.

Although few English or American readers are likely to know much about "**The Camargue,**" when they open the book, they cannot close it without feeling as if the regions of "AIGUES MORTES" in southern France were familiar and well-loved scenes.

So vivid are the local color,—the Provençal atmosphere, and the characteristics of the people described, that the book would seem like a translation, were it not for the pure,—vigorous,—original English in which it is written.

It is one of the Most Charming Stories

that has appeared for a long time, and we congratulate the host of disappointed readers who, on being asked during the summer and autumn—"Have you read—'**In the Camargue?**'" were obliged to answer "NO! there is only one copy at 'LORINGS,' and it is *always out*," that now this publisher has placed it in the power of them all, who run, not only to read, but to have for their own, for indeed this is a book to read more than once, and to put side by side with one's favorites.

We will not deprive the public of one iota of the keen interest it will enjoy, by hinting at the story of

IN THE CAMARGUE.

It is told so graphically and well, that any abstract would do it wrong.

The style is so picturesque and poetical that

ROSA BONHEUR

might paint the portrait of the white bull "Oriflamme,"—or

TENNYSON

take "Noel Privas" as his heroine for an Idyll.

But indeed the tale as it is told needs no illustration. It paints its own pictures, and sings its own songs. The Protestant reader may perhaps feel inclined to smile at the

Miracles Performed

at the "Feast of the Three Marys," and will of course feel a want of sympathy with the whole stream of Romanism pervading the book, but the noble beauty and pathos of

Rambert, The Cattle Driver's

life and death, and the exquisite sadness of the closing chapters, are of no creed or country, and appeal to our common human nature.

Mrs. Warren's Home Manuals.

LORING, PUBLISHER, BOSTON.

My Lady-Help, and what She Taught Me.

Neat Paper Cover, Price 50 cts.

How I Managed My House on £200 a Year.

Price, 38 cts.

Comfort for Small Incomes.

Price, 38 cts.

How I Managed My Children from Infancy to Marriage.

Price, 38 cts.

How to Choose a House and Furnish it at a Small Expense.

Price, 38 cts.

"MRS. WARREN'S admirable and popular stories are worth a hundred times more than they cost the purchaser."

"The subjects are treated in a way that will insure their being read,—***and if read,***—they cannot fail to instruct and impress."

"Husbands and wives—fathers and mothers—you will find in these stories real treasures of great value."

10388.

Two Kisses

Florence Marryat's Novels.

(50 Cent Books.)

A STAR AND A HEART.

A London "star" actress, and the new "tenor" of the Royal Opera Company, are the central figures in this fascinating novel.

LOVE'S CONFLICT.

"He jests at scars who never felt a wound."

TOO GOOD FOR HIM.

"A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to suffer, and command."

WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

FOR EVER AND EVER.

"He asked Life of Thee, and Thou gavest it him,
Even length of days for ever and ever."

THE CONFESSIONS OF GERALD ESTCOURT.

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scourge us."

NELLY BROOKE. A homely story.

"Love is strong as death."

THE GIRLS OF FEVERSHAM.

VERONIQUE. A Romance.

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence."

PETRONEL. A Novel.

A LUCKY DISAPPOINTMENT.

"Time works wonders even in Love."

FLORENCE MARRYAT, inherited a great name, and her own genius has won for herself great fame as a novelist both sides of the Atlantic.

WHICH SHALL IT BE?

By MRS. ALEXANDER, author of "The Wooing O't."

No one can read this book without being struck by the more than ordinary ability it displays.—*London Saturday Review.*

FOR A WOMAN'S SAKE.

By WATTS PHILLIPS.

"Powerfully drawn characters and situations, make this a remarkable Novel."

ARTISTE.

By MARIA M. GRANT. A young and gifted Actress makes her debut in Paris, arousing the wildest enthusiasm there and in the few European cities in which she appears. Love snatches her from the stage. Read the story.

FAIR WOMEN.

By MRS. FORRESTER. "One of the best English Society Novels published."

"FAIR WOMEN," is the great hit of the season — so fresh, piquant, and bright, it makes other novels seem tame.

FROM OLYMPUS TO HADES.

By MRS. FORRESTER, author of "Fair Women." "A story that any woman or man might well be proud to have written."

OLIVE VARCOE.

By MRS. NOTLEY. One of the most brilliant, and startling English Novels written. It will have a host of readers.

LORDS AND LADIES: Or, The Challenge.

By the Author of "Queen of the County,' "Margaret and her Bridesmaids," &c.

"It is one of the most amusing stories with which the literature of fiction has been enriched this season."—*London Morning Post.*

THE ROUA PASS: Or, Englishmen in the Highlands.

"It is seldom that we have to notice so good a novel as the *Roua Pass.* The story is well contrived and well told; the incidents are natural and varied; several of the characters are skilfully drawn, and that of the heroine is fresh, powerful, and original." [*London Saturday Review.*

TWICE LOST.

"This Novel is irresistible. We don't want to use a stereotyped expression, but we do say, read one chapter and you cannot leave it. . . . . Altogether, for spiciness, for raciness, for cultivation, for a spirited plot, and rapid, skilful development, this book has not its equal." [*Boston Post.*

A WEEK IN A FRENCH COUNTRY-HOUSE.

By MRS. ADELAIDE (KEMBLE) SARTORIS.

"The story is a gem. Its delineations of character are admirable: it is not often that any writer has brought so many characteristic portraits within the limits of one short tale. [*Philadelphia Age.*

LORING'S TALES OF THE DAY.

THOUSANDS UPON THOUSANDS" have been sold already, and the end is not yet.

HELEN'S BABIES.
By Their Latest Victim.

A WIDOW OF WINDSOR.
By ANNIE GASKELL.

THE MAN WHO WAS NOT A COLONEL.
By A HIGH PRIVATE.

A LOST LOVE.
By ASHFORD OWEN.

KITTY'S CLASS-DAY AT HARVARD.
By LOUISA M. ALCOTT.

ZERUB THROOP'S EXPERIMENT.
By MRS. A. D. T. WHITNEY.

A LUCKY DISAPPOINTMENT.
By FLORENCE MARRYAT.

LEFT-HANDED ELSA.
[*Reprinted from "Blackwood."*]

WILL IT BE?
By MRS. HELEN J. FORD.

DOT AND DIME. Two Characters in Ebony.
By One who Knows all About Them.

UNCLAIMED. A Story of English Life.
By An English Woman.

IN THE CAMARGUE. A Story of Southern France.
By EMILY BOWLES.

BEAUTIFUL EDITH, The Child-Woman.

TWO KISSES. **By HAWLEY SMART.**

FOUR IRREPRESSIBLES.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
00023076469